# The Irulas of the Blue Mountains

Foreign and Comparative Studies/South Asian Series, No. 13

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

# Table of Contents


Acknowledgments ..... xi
Note on Transliteration and Pronunciation ..... xiii
Preface ..... xv
Map of the Nilgiri Area ..... xx

Introduction ..... 1
1 The Nilgiris ..... 5
2 The Irula Country ..... 19
3 Plants, Beasts, and Birds in Irula Life and Lore ..... 33
4 The Irulas and Others ..... 49
5 Day-to-Day Life of the Irulas ..... 67
6 The Life Cycle ..... 93
7 The Irula Language and Verbal Art ..... 107
8 Irula Stories, Dance, and Music ..... 115
9 Irula Religion ..... 135
10 Myths ..... 149

Ne Plus Ultra ..... 163
Appendix A ..... 167
Appendix B ..... 169
Bibliography ..... 171
Index ..... 176
Note on the Author ..... 187

# List of Illustrations

## Maps


1 Nilgiri area ..... xx
2 Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary ..... 40


## Table


1 Sources of Irula income ..... 85


## Figures


1 Mele Nāḍu Irula girl (photo) ..... ii
2 Rangaswami Peak (photo) ..... 13
3 Mysore Ditch (photo) ..... 14
4 Mele Nāḍu Irula village of Kūnjapeṇe (photo) ..... 21
5 Mele Nāḍu Irula village of Garkiyur (photo) ..... 26
6 Primitive Irula hut (photo) ..... 27
7 Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irula woman (photo) ..... 28
8 Toda priest with bark of sacred tree (photo) ..... 37
9 Linguistic relationships ..... 50
10 Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irula girl (photo) ..... 51
11 Irula tribal complex ..... 52
12 Toda women (photo) ..... 58
13 Toda man (photo) ..... 59
14 Ground plan of Irula settlement ..... 69
15 Traditional Irula house ..... 72
16 Inside of traditional Irula house ..... 73
17 Ūrāḷi house in Gundri (photo) ..... 74
18 Pudenda covering ..... 76
19 Tattoo designs ..... 77
20 Illegal manufacture of liquor (photo) ..... 81
21 Irula tools ..... 82
22 Ūrāḷi village of Gundri (photo) ..... 84
23 *Guḍra* ..... 102
24 Memorial temple in Kūnjapeṇe (photo) ..... 103
25 Irulas dancing during a funeral (photo) ..... 104
26 Historical development of the Irula language ..... 110
27 Irula wind instruments ..... 130
28 Irula musicians with oboes (photo) ..... 131
29 Irula musicians with drums (photo) ..... 132
30 The *pēyguḍi* of Garkiyur ..... 142
31 Badirän, the *bujāri* of Garkiyur (photo) ..... 143
32 'Toda cathedral' (photo) ..... 159

# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to all my Irula informants from the four Irula-speaking tribal communities who were ready to talk, sing, play, laugh, and dance for me and with me during my field trips to their territory in 1968, 1976, 1978, and 1981. I am indebted to the following individuals and institutions, friends and colleagues, for their assistance, advice, and encouragement: to the Directorate of Harijan and Tribal Welfare in Madras; to K. Inbasagaran, once Collector of the Nilgiri District, and Mr. Madan, B. D. O., Kotagiri; to Mr. Balakrishnan, the headmaster of the tribal residential school at Kalampalla; to Mr. A. V. Selvadurai, the teacher at the Garkiyur school for Irula children; to Mr. Madan, the headmaster of the school at Kunjapene; to the superiors and sisters of St. Mary's Convent, Kotagiri, of Arokia Madha Maddam at Gundri, and the convents at Mulli and Satyamangalam; and to the late Dr. S. Narasimhan of Kotagiri.

A special vote of thanks must go to J. D. Rajiah, retired Deputy Tahsildar, Ootacamund, who was my interpreter, assistant, and friend during two of my field trips, and to my student and companion, Dr. S. C. Kersenboom-Story, for her encouragement, help, and care.

I am in innumerable ways indebted to the writings of and talks with my colleagues, M. B. Emeneau, G. F. Diffloth, W. A. Noble, and D. B. Kapp. My second trip would have been impossible without the friendly hospitality of D. B. Kapp, just as my first (and in many ways most thrilling, albeit short) trip would have been impossible without the generosity of the late V. S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar, and the warm assistance of Mrs. Kokilam Subbiah and Mrs. Beryl Evam Piljean-Wiedemann.

Finally, I am grateful to all those in the South Asian Series of the Foreign and Comparative Studies Program at Syracuse University, who have shown more than ordinary interest and offered more than due help to put this manuscript together in a publishable (and, I hope, readable) form.

# Note on Transliteration and Pronunciation

It is virtually impossible to employ or devise a uniform system of transliteration or transcription for an area of the Nilgiris. First, it includes languages whose knowledge and state of linguistic description is of a very wide range, from most sophisticated treatment (e.g., Toda, Kota, Ālu Kuṟumba, and Irula) to virtual ignorance (e.g., Paṇiyan or Shōlega). Second, the descriptions produced by various linguists of different theoretical persuasions and methodological training employ different systems of transliteration/transcription, but they must be respected (since they are often the only systems available). Third, the area comprises languages of many very different phonetic and phonemic systems. In this book, words appear that belong both to the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian families: Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Kannaḍa, Toda, Kota, Irula, and Kuṟumba words, for example. Hence, in what follows, I shall as briefly as possible define only the most unfamiliar sounds and symbols occurring in native words appearing in the text.

First, a note on the names of the languages. Familiar and anglicized language names (such as Sanskrit and Tamil) were left intact. Irula should, strictly speaking, be written *ërɭa/ërṛa*, for that is the phonetic transcription of the language as its speakers pronounce it; however, Irula (derived from the Tamil *iruḷa*) has already become familiar and is therefore used throughout this book. In contrast, the names of less familiar or newly discovered languages such as Paṇiyan or Jēnu Kuṟumba appear in (more or less) precise transcription. There is a problem about Badaga, which some authors call Baḍagu or Baḍugu; nevertheless, the form Badaga is fairly familiar and as such is used herein.

The most complicated phonetic/phonemic system is obviously that of the Toda language. Details of Toda phonetics and a detailed explanation of the transcription may be found in M.B. Emeneau's *Toda, a Dravidian Language* (1957:15-66). The most unfamiliar symbols appearing in the present book and reflecting Toda sounds are as follows:

ï represents a cèntralized i

ü represents a high rounded centralized u

ö represents a central rounded o

there is a distinction between tongue-tip/blade dental, tongue-tip alveolar, and retroflexed stops, e.g., t/t̪/ṭ

ɾ is a trill of four or five taps in post-dental/alveolar position, while ɽ is a trill with strongly retroflex position

there are retroflex laterals: voiceless (ɬ, ɬ̣) and voiced (l, ḷ)

there are eight sibilants: post-dental (s, z), tip-alveolar (s̻, z̻), tip-alveolar palatalized (š, ž), and retroflex (ṣ, ẓ)

θ is a voiceless dental fricative

x is a voiceless velar fricative

ʒ is a voiced post-dental affricate [dz]

The Irula phonetic system is much less complicated. Irula, too, has centralized vowels: ï, ü, ë, ö, ä. It has a distinction between dental, alveolar, and retroflex consonants; e.g., t̪ and ɾ̪ are alveolar, whereas ṭ and ḍ and ṇ are retroflex. The dot under a consonant indicates, in Irula, Kuṛumba, Tamil, Sanskrit, and Toda — in fact in all the languages concerned — a cacuminal or retroflex pronunciation. Tamil l̤ is a voiced retroflex fricative vibrant; in popular transcription, this sound is found most frequently as zh. However, ɽ indicates the same consonant in reconstructed Dravidian protoforms. Irula š is an alveopalatal sibilant (corresponding roughly to Sanskrit ś). In all languages concerned, the velar nasal is indicated by ṅ. The tilde (~) over a vowel indicates nasalization of the vowel; occurring over n, it indicates the palatal nasal (as in the French "cognac"). Length of vowels is indicated by superscribed dash; e.g., ā is long a. The small superscribed $^{n}$ in Kuṛumba words indicates light final nasal at the end of words.

# Preface

Life is an inexplicable mystery. Here I am in a Dutch village, by origin a Czech born in Prague (the most beautiful city in the world) of mixed Czech-German-Jewish-French ancestry, listening to a tape that contains the warm, happy giggling of a lad of the South Indian tribe, the Irulas. And what is more, it is my profession to listen to the tape and to work it out according to the principles and methods of anthropological linguistics.

How it came about I shall tell in this book. I also wish to speak about the Irulas themselves (and about other tribal communities living in the Nilgiris, the magnificent Blue Mountains of South India), about the procedures leading to their discovery, and about the research into their language, folklore, and myths. It may be an odd coincidence, or my personal destiny: I do remember that, for an entirely inexplicable reason, when I first heard the word "Irulas" — apparently designating these tribal peoples as 'savages of darkness' (*iruḷ*) — I felt an unusual thrill that made me read and study first **about** them and then, repeatedly, **among** them. This first encounter with the Irulas occurred sometime in 1952-53, in the Oriental Institute in Prague, while I was reading Fedor Jagor's rather ancient account titled *Südindische Volksstämme* (Berlin, 1914), as well as a much more ancient report by Buchanan, published in 1807. How excited I was when I found the Irulas mentioned as early as 1711, in Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's invaluable *Malabarisches Heydenthum.*

In the pages of this book, then, I will speak primarily of the Irulas. However, I also met and frequently enjoyed the friendship of the handsome Todas, and I have studied their entirely fascinating language and even more intriguing myths and sexual mores. I have known a few Kotas, too — sad, very sad encounters indeed; and the 'weird,' dreaded Kuṟumbas; the tribal elephant drivers in the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary, who talk to their animals in a strange language; the lovable, energetic Ūrāḷis of Gundri, as well as their impoverished and miserable brothers down in Budimadu; and the Kasabas, Shōlegas, and Paṇiyans. These, too, will figure occasionally in the following pages, for they are all children of the Nilgiris, and they all lived there for many centuries before the plainspeople and the white men opened the Blue Mountains to our precarious civilization and ruthless exploitation.

My audacity in writing and publishing a few pages about the Nilgiri tribes before I first saw them had unexpected results. True to the Yiddish saying *Chutzpah gilt* [cheek helps], my rather bold move brought me into correspondence, and later personal contact, with one of the greatest of contemporary Indologists (also one of the kindest, most honest men I know) Murray B. Emeneau. I sent him the offprints and a letter that must have sounded to him vaguely programmatic, somewhat presumptuous, but perhaps above all rather naive. Yet he answered promptly, with characteristic kindness, and his answer contained nothing but encouragement and good advice. I must confess that it was some years before I followed up this early trend in my studies; I dedicated all my time and energy to Tamil — the language, the literature, the culture — and only in 1968 entered again the field of Nilgiri research. However, this early contact with Emeneau was, despite my meanderings in the intervening years, very important. His books and papers have been a constant source of inspiration and joy to me, and I only wish I could fully emulate this great and modest scholar as my model.

This, I feel, is the place to speak at some length of my teachers and of my scholarly *paraṃparā*, or tradition-succession. A Zen master advised, "If you feel that the teacher is a real teacher, then give up your own ideas, and learn." Although my attitude toward my teachers has never lacked in critical spirit, I have treated them with respect, understanding, and affection, and those whom I considered to be 'real teachers,' I accepted as such with gratitude and pride.

My first and foremost line of teachers is connected with the Prague school of Indic philology represented by the names of Ludwig, Winternitz, and Zubatý. My own university teacher of Sanskrit and classical Indology, Professor V. Lesný, had studied with all three, Zubatý in particular, after a brief period of study under the famous Max Mueller at Oxford. Thus, via Lesný, I became acquainted with the sober philological methods of these Prague neo-grammarian-oriented Indologists. Lesný's pupil and colleague, O. Friš, whose death was so untimely and unfortunate, was also trained in the old philological tradition. More a poet than a scholar, Friš possessed an exceptionally keen sense of the aesthetic values of Indian literature. He was one of my Prague teachers, as was O. Pertold, who, despite his militant atheism and Marxist opportunism, was rather important for me since he was himself a student of South India and Tamil.[1]

In my post-university Indological work (though I have never, unfortunately, been their immediate, direct student), the following teachers and savants have influenced me to such an extent that I consider myself as belonging to their line. Above all, Murray Barnson Emeneau,[2] a student of E. Sapir (1884-1939), has exerted an influence on me; thus, in linguistics and anthropology, I do rather adhere to the school of Sapir as opposed to some other American linguistic traditions from the first half of this century. For quite some time, in my linguistic outlook and my theoretical thinking, I was under the spell of Kenneth L. Pike and his tagmemics and, among the younger Americans, of W. L. Chafe. However, it is for Professor Emeneau, a towering scholar whose work is of exceptional proportions and unquestionable excellence, that I reserve the highest respect, admiration, and affection.

While in Prague, I was naturally nourished by the theories of linguistic and literary structuralism of the great *école de Prague*, and I consider myself as belonging to this group, all of whose members I had the good fortune to

know: Roman Jakobson, B. Trnka, V. Mathesius, and J. Mukařovský.[3] Above all, of course, stands Jakobson, the unique and multi-faceted genius of modern linguistics, whose writings, along with Emeneau's, I must have always at my side.

In India, the situation is difficult to describe, for generally one either does or does not belong to a particular line of succession of teachers; an adherent of a given school may not simultaneously subscribe to another. The jealousy is enormous. So is the loyalty, and so are the envy and hatred. But there, one is really considered as **belonging** to a *paraṃparā*. When it comes to gods and divine masters, one can choose one's *iṣṭadevatā*, 'favored deity,' sit down at the master's feet, and thus become one of the line.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti sārambhām
Śaṅkarācārya madhyamam
Ramaṇācārya paryantām
Vande guru paraṃparām

Obeisance to the line of preceptors,
with Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the beginning,
Śaṅkara in the middle,
and Ramaṇa in the end!

With pandits, it is not so easy. But I may boast of two very respectable lines of teachers whom I have chosen. I 'sat at the feet' of Mahavidvan M. V. Venugopala Pillai, a Tamil pandit of Kanchipuram, with whom I read some Tamil classics and studied Tamil prosody (albeit rather briefly). Other than that, I regard myself as belonging, both by personal leaning and personal acquaintance, to the most illustrious line of Tamil scholars:

Mahavidvan Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1815-1876)
|
Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942)
|
K. V. Jagannathan (b. 1906)

The towering personality of Meenakshisundaram Pillai belongs entirely to that type of Tamil scholar who thrived in Hindu monasteries and propelled traditional training and wisdom, becoming a legend in his lifetime. Yet he was overshadowed by his pupil, Dr. Iyer, undoubtedly the greatest Tamil savant of our century. His autobiography makes up the triad (together with Jakobson's and Emeneau's books) that constitutes my bedside table reading. Through a personal acquaintance with K. V. Jagannathan, Dr. Iyer's student, I like to think of myself as belonging to this tradition, too.

I said that the Irulas are the chief subject of this book, for they have been the main target of both my scholarly interest and my personal affection. However, I cannot help speaking frequently of the Todas, the most colorful, handsomest, and in many ways the most fascinating of all Nilgiri communities. They are a puzzle, an enigma, with their goddess Tōkiṣy and her brother, the god Ōn, ruler of the realm of the dead. It was Ōn who brought forth from the earth more than a thousand buffaloes, the

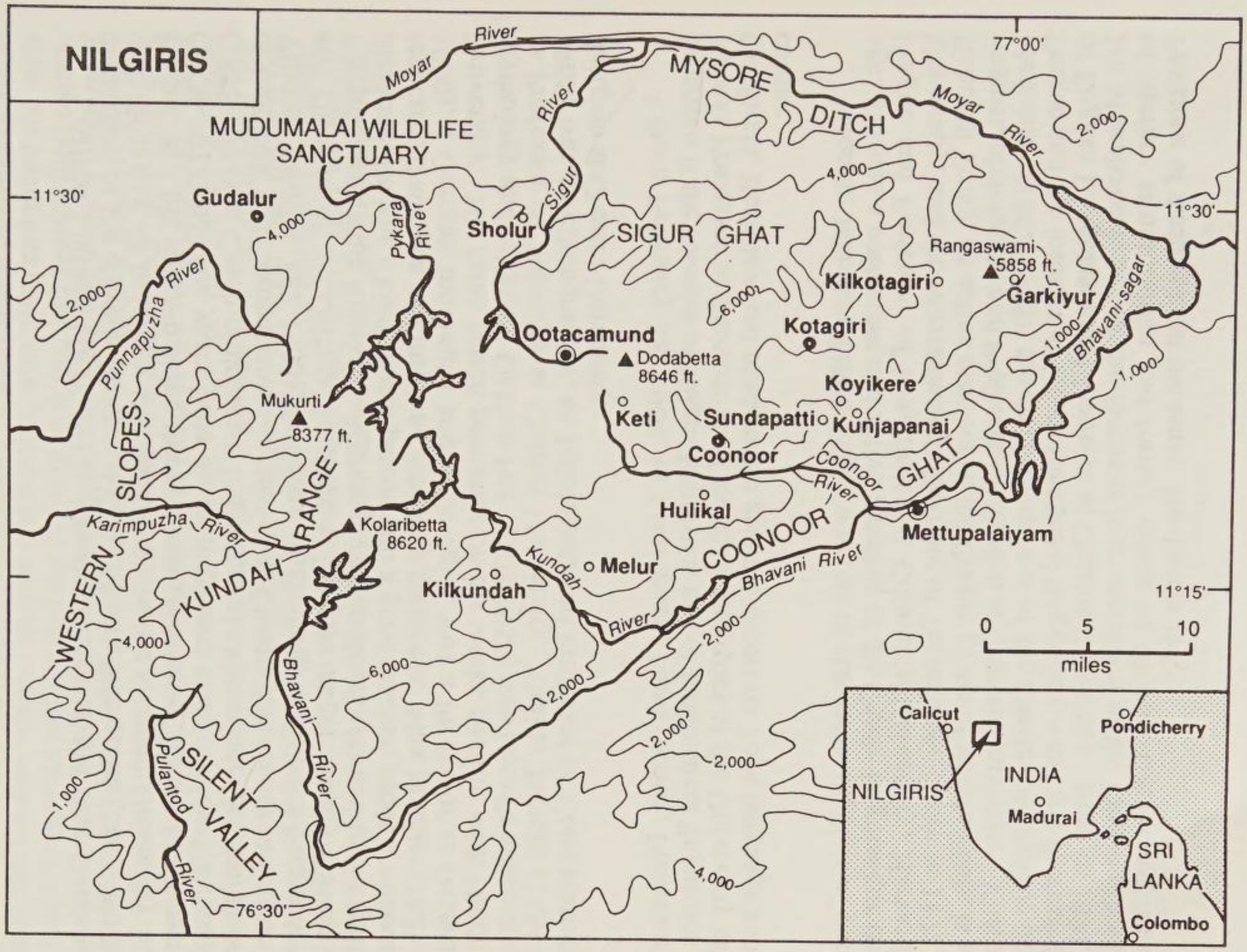
ancestors of the Todas' sacred herds, as well as the first man (the first Toda), who made his appearance clinging to the tail of the last buffalo. From time to time, I have gone about in a Toda *pūṭxuɬy*, a splendidly embroidered cloak; on my wrist I still wear a rich silver wristlet made by the Kotas but worn by the Todas, who call it *tagaş*. I had, and still have, good friends among the Todas: Nāşyxēn of the Meḷgāş clan; Mutxēn of the Kāş clan; Piɬyxēn, now deceased; and Īfam Pülʒēn, whose Christian name is Beryl and who is now Mrs. Wiedemann. I must make mention of these men and women whom I so love and admire; who often embraced me with their strong arms and pressed me in genuine friendship against their chests, so closely that I could smell the very particular Toda fragrance: a mixture of the effluvium of buffalo's milk and butter, of the scent of tobacco and hair oil, of liquor, of the sun on their skin, and of the Nilgiri air, perfumed with tea and eucalyptus. And the great adventure of the Toda language, which they call *ōɬ fōš* [the human tongue], with its incredibly difficult pronunciation and complex grammar! It sounds like the rustling of dry leaves in the wind, and the gurgling of a gushing mountain stream, and the buzzing and whispering of Nilgiri bees. Trying to imitate it is almost impossible: pronounce very fast, and with one strong puff of breath, something like *pízhkvazhkhem*, and you will have said "good-bye" in Toda.

# Notes

[1] Alfred Ludwig (1832-1912) was the author of the first German translation of the *Ṛgveda* (Prague, 1875). Moritz Winternitz (1863-1937) was Professor of Indology and Ethnology at the German University in Prague, and his epoch-making three-volume *History of Indian Literature* (1908-1922) has for years been an unsurpassed classic. Josef Zubatý (1855-1931), a Czech philologist, linguist, and Orientalist, was Professor of Indology and Comparative Linguistics at Charles University in Prague. Vincenc Lesný (1882-1953), Professor of Indology at Charles University and Director of the Oriental Institute at Prague, taught mainly Pali and Bengali apart from Sanskrit. A great expert in Buddhism and in Bengali literature, he was a kind, warm person and a good teacher, though without real critical acumen and inspiring scholarly greatness. Max Mueller (1823-1900), a German Indologist and philologist, was a Professor at Oxford University. His fame rested primarily on his works dealing with Hindu mythology and religion. Oldřich Friš (1903-1955) was Lesný's successor as Professor of Indology at Charles University. Otakar Pertold (1884-1965) was an ethnographer, an Indologist, and Professor of Comparative Religion at Charles University.

[2] Born February 28, 1904, in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Professor Emeneau is the founder of Nilgiri linguistics and of Indian areal linguistics. He was Professor of Sanskrit and General Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, and remains the greatest expert on Toda language and culture.

[3] Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) was one of the great linguists of our age. He was a cofounder and active member of the Cercle linguistique de Prague and Professor of Linguistics at Columbia University, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Born in 1895, Bohumil Trnka, an active member of the Prague group of structuralists, is a linguist, philologist, and Professor of English at Charles University. Vilém Mathesius (1882-1945), the *spiritus movens* of the Cercle linguistique de Prague and the founder of Czech functional linguistics, was First Professor of English Language and Literature at Charles University. Born in 1891, Jan Mukařovský, one of the foremost representatives of the Prague school of literary structuralism and former rector of Charles University, was Professor of Aesthetics at the same. He died in 1975.




Map 1: The Nilgiri area

# Introduction

Although the Irulas and my work with them have often filled me with great joy, I must regretfully begin this introduction on a sad note.

In 1980, a *New York Times* article titled "Twilight of Tribal Peoples" reported that

> There are few more sad and baffling problems than the remorseless destruction of what remains of primitive culture around the world. Tribal peoples in no way menace the more developed cultures that arrogantly call themselves 'civilizations.' To the contrary, it is the civilized who menace the primitive — with guns, with germs and most often with grandiose dams, highways and agricultural settlements....To the unsentimental, the disappearance of primitive cultures may be a matter of small concern. But technologically advanced society should not so quickly hold itself morally superior to societies that live in enviable harmony with their environment. It is not the 'primitive' peoples who have polluted the seas and invented nuclear weapons.

On February 26, 1978, I was talking to a young Kota in the beautiful valley of Old Agāl, an ancient Kota village (one of their seven ancestral places) from which they were removed after a landslide. He said, "This place will never again witness its rebirth." In many ways, unfortunately, his words apply to the entire Nilgiri area. Since the Nilgiris were opened up by the British around 1810, a gradual transformation of the mountains has destroyed their original face and the complex structure of their population, and it will never be the same again. Only the remote, dangerous jungles of western Wynaad still withstand this transformation. There lives a tribe

whose settlement may be reached only after seven miles' strenuous walk through thick, dark jungle, a trek that begins at Kizhkundah on the southwestern slopes of the Nilgiris. These people, according to a nun who had visited them several times with a French priest, Father Lefévre, climbed high into the trees when first contacted, for they had not previously seen a white man. They were still leading, so I was assured, a largely neolithic way of life.

There is another tribe, called Vēṭṭuvar, which numbers only a few families, living in a cave in the Konni Range of the Western Ghats. There is also a small tribe of the Aranadans in the Nilambur basin. These hunters, shooting with bow and arrow, have a partiality for monkey flesh, eat snakes, and (together with the Kadar and the Paṇiyans) possess probably the simplest and crudest tribal culture we know in Southern India.

To some extent, it is undoubtedly this "aroma of unknownness" that prompts the anthropologist to go into the jungles; this, and the encounter with the jungle itself and its life. It is a beautiful adventure. In the words of Lévi-Strauss,

> Leaving his country and his home for long periods; exposing himself to hunger, sickness and occasional danger; allowing his habits, his beliefs, his convictions to be tampered with, conniving at this, indeed, when without mental reservations or ulterior motives, he assumes the modes of life of a strange society, the anthropologist practices total observation, beyond which there is nothing except — and there is a risk — the complete absorption of the observer by the object of his observation. (1967:26)

This, then, and the dawns in the jungle, and the sunsets behind Rangaswami Peak. And the "aroma of unknownness," the challenge of adventure. Danger. As when I encountered a sloth bear, very early in the morning, during the false dawn. Or when a king cobra crawls under one's knees. Is there danger from the tribals, too?

I have not come across human sacrifice or its vestiges anywhere in the Nilgiris. However, Gnanambal mentions that one of her Kanikar informants had heard from his father and maternal uncle of the days when human sacrifices were offered to the goddess Naranili. One family in particular had to supply the victim, a boy of twelve, and the sacrifice was offered once in twelve years, the blood of the victim being collected in a vessel and sprinkled about in order to ensure prosperity (1954:19).

Obviously, that was long ago. But I have come into much closer contact with human sacrifice. J. D. Rajiah (b. 1918), a retired Deputy Tahsildar who has spent his whole life among the Nilgiris and who twice acted as my assistant and my colleague, assured me that as a child he had been snatched by some tribals, presumably Kuṟumbas, to be sacrificed. Fortunately, the Todas rescued him, and he remained with them, although his family came from the Telugu-speaking plains area. This is why he still has so many close friends among the Todas, and why he is one of the few non-Todas speaking their incredibly difficult language with complete ease and fluency.

There are, however, less romantic and more serious and scholarly reasons for anthropological research. Peoples who live by hunting and gathering are among the few existing representatives of a way of life that was, until about 10,000 years ago, a human universal. We must realize that human language, basic social structures, human nature itself evolved during the 99 percent of human history when people lived as hunting and gathering communities. The contemporary hunter-gatherers have, therefore, much to teach us about our own past, although there probably does not exist anywhere in the world a 'pure,' unaffected hunter-gatherer culture (Lee 1979).

The Irulas — whether Irulas proper or Ūrāḷis or Kasabas — live in two cultural worlds, like most Kuṟumbas, Paṇiyans, and a few other tribes of the lower Nilgiris. During daytime, they work on coffee or tea plantations or tend Badaga cattle, and they are thus exposed to exploitation, capitalist forms of economy, sophisticated agriculture, and so on. But their nights and their free time are spent in environmental settings that still contain many elements of their past culture, based on hunting-gathering and swidden agriculture. Some Ūrāḷis combine gathering (e.g., of fuel wood) with barter. One of the most urgent reasons for Nilgiri studies, for the detailed research into Nilgiri-area tribal communities, is the fact that despite changes introduced since about 1810-1830, there has been a striking survival of the old ways. Thus, for example, the Irulas and Kuṟumbas, though forced to end large-scale shifting slash-and-burn cultivation in the last century (between 1881 and 1884), now shift cultivated plots on land that they own. Kotas have lived in only seven traditionally occupied villages for many centuries, and continue to do so. Kuṟumbas are still feared because of their power over the supernatural, and thereby they earn income, continuing to function as doctors, magicians, and sorcerers. Toda economy and occupancy forms persist after 100 years of pressure, although the government forces them to change from pastoralists to potato-growers (Noble 1968:185-86).

What can the tribals of the Nilgiris teach us? For one thing, they can teach us to appreciate leisure; they can teach us to have less neurotic, paranoid attitudes towards time; and they can teach us to forget the awful slogan, "time is money." Getting rid of the limiting and excessively dominant ego, and learning to live in the 'now' may be the main message of Zen, but it is also a lesson that may be learned from our tribal friends in the Nilgiris. We suffer from the folly of self-aggrandizement, over-organization of time and energy, earnestness devoid of humor. They don't. Let us learn from them.

In Western culture, a strict distinction is made, with varying degrees of emphasis, between the world of nature and the world of man. The nature-versus-culture opposition finds its expression in life, in language, in myth, in the struggle of the environmentalists. In the tribal milieu, the world of nature and that of man are still, to a great extent, one world. Man, indeed, struggles and sometimes wins, sometimes succumbs; but he remains an unalienated part of nature. His birth and his death, health and disease, belong as much to the nature surrounding him as do the sunshine and the rain, the dew of the mornings, the heat of the middays, and the darkness of midnight. My tribal friends exhibit neither the romantic admiration of nature typical of a European city-dweller, nor the predatory, annihilating drive of a Wild West frontier pioneer.

Why does a Westerner feel more comfortable and somehow more 'free' with a Toda, or even an Irula or Kuṟumba (in spite of the deep differences

just mentioned) than with a high-caste Hindu? Because, like a Westerner, a tribal is basically (to use Louis Dumont's terms) a *homo equalis*, whereas a Hindu is typically a convinced *homo hierarchicus*. However, Nilgiri tribals were treated unkindly by most Westerners in Southern India. This is not the place to go into the history of plantation laborers (often recruited from such tribes as the Irulas, Kasabas, and Shōlegas); suffice it to say that only a few years ago, the master-serf relationship and bond labor still existed in the Nilgiri Wynaad area. The Indians from the plains treated (and very often still treat) the tribals worse than did their erstwhile white masters. Thus, the Nilambur raja and his henchmen, representing the Hindu establishment, treated the Paṇiyans as the lowest slaves. So-called 'primitive' tribes are still persecuted in many areas of India. Thus, for example, according to the *International Herald Tribune* (April 15, 1979), a member of parliament in New Delhi, A. K. Roy, accused the government of Bihar State of waging a brutal campaign against the impoverished tribesmen; local officials and landlords unleashed a reign of terror on the tribesmen of Singhbum District (about 140 miles west of Calcutta). The tragic events in 1980 at Tripura have put India's unity and humanity under severe strain. These, too, are valid reasons for writing a book about the last vestiges of a way of life that once was universal.

The most urgent problem facing humanity as the millennium approaches is man's obvious incapability to match the enormous progress in technology and intellectual achievements with comparable development in the realm of emotion and ethics. Such scientific and technological accomplishments as nuclear fission, genetic engineering, and sophisticated computers — while themselves ethically neutral and technologically marvelous — pose the greatest danger to our survival as free, dignified human beings.

A book about our 'primitive' brothers living a simple life in the jungles of South India may be the sort of antidote needed to counterbalance a civilization that threatens to enslave us.

# 1

## The Nilgiris

The year 1968 represents a kind of watershed in our knowledge of the Irulas and their language. William A. Noble's important dissertation is dated January 1 of that year, which also saw the completion of Gerard F. Diffloth's thesis on the Irula language. In January, I visited the Nilgiris for the first time — Noble's and Diffloth's dissertations were not yet accessible[1] — and soon found that my interest in the Irulas, first expressed in print in 1954,[2] was legitimate and stimulating. Later in 1968, I published my first brief announcement that Irula was an independent South Dravidian language.

This first encounter with the Nilgiris[3] resulted in love at first sight. It is no wonder: when one approaches the Nilgiris from the plains of Coimbatore, the mountains seem to rise like an invincible bastion, towering majestically, magnificent in their blue haze (see Fig. 2). They are one of the few areas in South India where life has been preserved, at least to some extent, in its pristine form and meaning.

The mountains are bounded on the north by the Mysore Ditch (see Fig. 3) and the hills immediately beyond it, which form part of the Mysore Plateau (2624-3280 feet). In the west and southwest, the plateau extends to Wynaad, some parts of which are among the most backward areas in India. In the south, the river Bhavani separates the Nilgiris from the Vellangiri Hills and the Coimbatore plains. In the east, the Tamil plains with the town of Mettupalaiyam and the Bhavani are, anthropologically, part of the Nilgiri region as are the Bhavanisagar area, the town of Satyamangalam, and the Biligiri-Rangana Hills beyond in the northeast. Vertically, the Nilgiri area ranges from about 984 feet to 8646 feet above sea level. The Nilgiri Plateau itself is a relatively small area of about 40 by 20 miles, comprising the Wenlock Downs, the Kundah Range, the northern part of the Upper

Bhavani, the southwestern and southeastern plateaus, and the central Dodabetta Range.

To the west of the Nilgiris, the Malabar plains of Kerala State stretch in a northeast-southwest direction, bounded by the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. From here the Nilgiri mountains rise rather abruptly to considerable heights — the wall-like Kundah Range, with Mukurti 8377 feet high and Kolaribetta 8620 feet high, the most impressive

The Upper Bhavani River divides the Nilgiris from the Vellangiri Hills (Elival Malai, 6845 feet). This region is the home of the small and highly interesting tribe of Pālu Kuṟumbas [literally, Milk Kuṟumbas], who live in just nine hamlets, the principal among them being Toḍiki. To the southwest of that part of the region lies the largest town of the entire area, Coimbatore (population about 500,000). Coimbatore has an important airport and railway station, heavy industry, and significant schools, and it is the economic and administrative center of the district of the same name. Although it is now inhabited entirely by plainspeople, mostly Tamilians, a legend connects Coimbatore with the Irulas. According to persistent oral tradition among the Irulas, the city's name derives from the personal name of an Irula chieftain, Kōyan or Kōvan (Coimbatore = Kōyanputtūr 'the new town of Kōyan'). Not far from Coimbatore is the small but important temple of Kāraimaḍai, which, although currently a Vaishnava shrine, has undoubtedly tribal (Irula) connections.

To the north of the Nilgiris proper stretches the extensive Mysore Plateau of Karnataka State. Morphologically, the Mysore Plateau and its southern extension, the Wynaad, belong to the immense Deccan Plateau. The Moyar River cuts a deep canyon (984 feet) into the Mysore Plateau and joins the Bhavani just east of the Nilgiris. The Bhavanisagar Water Reservoir is an artificial addition to the landscape below the eastern slopes; it offers an unforgettable view from the ancient Irula village of Garkiyur, one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen. The Moyar Canyon opens into a broader valley of breath-taking but somewhat harsh beauty, the Mysore Ditch, which stretches from west to east: a great malarial ravine that is the homeland of wild elephants, panthers, bears, snakes, mosquitoes, and occasionally tigers. Not long ago, the ditch was the route of the conquering armies of Sultan Tippu; although the "Tiger of Mysore" was killed in battle by the British in 1799, memories of him are still very much alive among the tribals of the area.

The Nilgiri massif proper forms a compact plateau of about 1004 square miles with a summit level of about 6000-8000 feet, rising with extreme abruptness on all sides: on the eastern slope, for example, there is a drop of 6000 feet over 1.5 to 2 miles. The massif is, as it were, islanded between the Moyar and Bhavani Rivers. One of the most striking features of the Nilgiris, apart from their bluish tint, is their massive and majestic appearance.

From the Nilambur Basin, only 190 feet above sea level, the western slope rises to the towering Kundah Range, which culminates in the Kolaribetta (8620 feet), south of the triangular Mukurti Peak (8377 feet). South of the Sispara Pass, the ascent is not so dramatic; the western slopes are interrupted by the Silent Valley. The Bhavani flows along the foot of the southwestern escarpment towards the Kaveri, thus forming the southern boundary of the mountains. The Coonoor Ghat and the eastern slopes stand up to heights of 4900-5900 feet. The most prominent mountain at the east end of the plateau is the Irulas' sacred Rangaswami Peak (5858 feet). My lovely Irula village, Garkiyur, is situated on its eastern slope. From the

village, one has a view of the deep, dramatic gorge with its lush vegetation, of the opposite slopes with the Irula settlements of Kokkodu and Rekkodu. At a distance, one may see, deep down toward the east and shimmering in the morning mists, the isolated granite and gneiss hills rising from the Coimbatore plains. The whole village is covered by a protective umbrella of rich vegetation: oranges, lemons, limes, plantains, pomegranates, mangoes, jack trees, even a few coconut palms. Nearby, a savage jungle, home to bears, panthers, and monkeys, covers the lower slopes of the sacred mountain of Raṅga. Garkiyur is the very heart of Irula country, and if I were free at this moment to make such a decision, I would choose this village as the place where I would end my days.

The most spectacular formation among the hills of the northeastern section of the Nilgiris is the isolated sharp needle-rock called the Rangaswami Pillar. It poses mortal danger to aircraft flying through the Nilgiris. In the north, the Sigur Ghat surmounts the Mysore Plateau by 2600-3300 feet. In the northeast, beyond the canyon of the Moyar and on the other side of the Bhavani, one may make out groups of massive hills, a part of which are the Biligiri-Rangana Hills, a forest range situated in the Yelandur Taluk of the Mysore District, Karnataka State. They are the homeland of the Shōlegas. Immediately to the east, the Irula-speaking Ūrāḷis live in the Gobi Taluk of the Coimbatore District, Tamilnadu State.

Save for its western parts — the Wenlock Downs undulating gently west of Ootacamund toward the Kundah Range, and a smaller area around Kodanadu [the Land's End] in the northeastern corner — the elevated plateau was dissected on its sides by the erosive force of numerous rivers and streams. The Nilgiri massif was carved into ridges and peaks isolated by a system of valleys and basins, and it holds many narrow gorges and waterfalls as tall as 394 feet. This erosion was particularly strong in the eastern and southeastern plateaus, where the central Dodabetta Range towers over the Nilgiris: Dodabetta [the Big Mountain], 8646 feet; Snowdon, 8298 feet; Elk Hill in Ootacamund, 8088 feet; and Club Hill, 8029 feet, also in Ootacamund.

Sometime around A.D. 1117, General Punisa Dandanayaka, serving the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana, invaded the Nilgiris and "frightened the Toda" (cf. Rice 1898). This date is the first reliable historical date concerning any of the Nilgiri tribes. On the basis of linguistic evidence, however, we may infer that the Todas and Kotas, and possibly the Kurumbas and Irulas as well, have been living in the Nilgiri area for at least 2000 years.

In 1601 (?), the Roman Catholic bishop of Malabar, Dom Francisco Rosa, a Portuguese, heard a rumor that a strange race of people were living in a country called Todramala, up in the Nilgiris; the Todramala were said to be descendants of the early Christians of St. Thomas. The bishop sent Father Jacomo Finicio [Yacome Fenicio], S. J., to the Nilgiris in 1603, to find these people. In spite of many difficulties, Finicio reached the Todas, but, of course, he did not find a single Christian or make a single convert. "Thanks be to God, I am returned from Todamalâ, though with great labor and little satisfaction," wrote the Jesuit father to the Jesuit vice-provincial at Calicut, on April 1, 1603. He was astonished at the awesome magnificence of the steep mountains, and at the handsomeness and *politesse* of the Todas. He reported having met a Toda priest, "a huge man, well proportioned, with a long beard and hair like a Nazarene falling on his shoulders." He also mentioned the important fact that the "Thodares only number a thousand." Thus, almost four centuries ago, the number of Todas was as it is now:

indeed, a remarkable stability. Apart from the "Badegas" and the Todas, Finicio mentions no other tribe.[4]

The Nilgiris figure, then, in subsequent centuries, briefly — only too briefly! — in various travelogues and other works of early Indology. Ziegenbalg mentions the Irulas and Kuṟumbas in his 1711 *Malabarisches Heydenthum*, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Abbé J. A. Dubois mentioned "Kadu-Kurumbars, Sholigars, and Irulers" (1906, passim); he also wrote:

> There is one of these holy mountains in the Carnatic, in the district of Coimbatore. It is called *Nilagiri-Malai*, and is believed to be the highest in the province. For this reason alone the Hindus have made it a *punyasthala*, or place of virtue, their custom being to deify everything extraordinary in nature. As it is very difficult to reach the top of this mountain, a view of the summit alone (and it is visible a long way off) is considered sufficient to remove the burden of sin from the conscience of any person who looks at it; provided that he looks at it with that intention. (Ibid., 196)

In 1806, the government appointed Colonel Mackenzie to prepare a topographic survey of the Nilgiris. But, according to Price, the mountains' climate so frightened the topographers that they did not cover a single acre. So, in 1812, William Keys led another expedition, which was successful; the result was a topographical description "of the Neelaghery Mountains."

Finally, in 1818, the Collector of Coimbatore, John Sullivan, visited the Nilgiris for the first time. From the topographers' report, the British found that a three-fold treasure was available in the hills: teak, ebony, and good climate. The white man's conquest and exploitation of the Nilgiris began. The hills were hailed with rapture as miraculous givers of health. Lord Lytton, viceroy from 1876 to 1880, wrote ecstatically to his wife:

> it far surpasses all that its most enthusiastic admirers and devoted lovers have said to us about it. The afternoon was rainy and the road muddy, but such beautiful *English* rain, such delicious *English* mud. Imagine Hertfordshire lanes, Devonshire downs, Westermoreland lakes, Scotch trout streams, and Lusitanian views! (Woodford 1978:144)

Molly Panter-Downes gave a more realistic description of Ootacamund:

> an English dream made a shade delirious and out of true by the high, thin air, combined with all that many a heart loved with passion in India — the outdoor life, the horses, the wild animals, the early wakings in the Indian mornings, with their matchless dazzling

> purity that makes each day seem the first ever created. (Ibid., 141)

The *Oriental Sporting Magazine* for October 1829 included

> A List of Game killed by a Gentleman in the Neilgherries within the last six months: 33 and a half couple of woodcock; 30 head of black deer; 1 jungle sheep; 3 wild dogs; 7 bears; 7 hogs; 1 royal tiger, length 9 feet 7 inches (killed 10 miles from Ooty); 1 cheeta [sic]; 100 brace and upward of jungle fowl and spur fowl; 20 brace and more of hares; 12 brace or more of peafowl; brace of quail, often 8 to 10 brace a day; snipe, 4 or 5 brace a day; imperial pigeon, 20 brace.

It is no wonder that such murderous games diminished the reservoir of food for the hunting-gathering tribes of Irulas and Kuṟumbas.

We can only guess what the Nilgiris looked like before the white raj and, in its wake, the Hindu plainspeople, began to colonize and exploit the mountains; before coffee and tea plantations, cinchona, and eucalyptus became part of the Nilgiri landscape; before the Badagas adopted Western-imported vegetables such as potatoes and cabbage and transformed the lower Nilgiri valleys into fields and gardens. It would seem that several separate, individual tribal communities lived in the mountains in relative isolation and yet in harmonious coexistence based on vague economic coordination and overall integration in one sociocultural hypersystem. On top (literally and metaphorically) were the Todas: strictly vegetarian herdsmen, with their huge semi-wild buffaloes, their mythology and religion entirely *sui generis*, their ritualized dairies. Another small tribe, the Kotas, were meat-eaters; the artisans and musicians of the mountains, they also practiced incipient agriculture. The Kotas, too, had their own religion, mythology, folklore, and culture; they lived on the plateau.

In the tropical forests situated more than a half-mile below the Toda and Kota realm lived various tribes of hunter-gatherers, practicing, in addition, what seems to have been a kind of shifting cultivation. These 'wild' and 'savage' tribes spoke different dialects or languages of two language groups: Kuṟumba and Irula. Whereas the Irulas and Kuṟumbas obviously had much in common and a relatively lively intercourse, the contacts between the jungle-dwellers and the Todas and Kotas were rare and uneasy. The Kuṟumbas were regarded as weird sorcerers; the Irulas may have provided the Toda 'aristocracy' with honey, edible yams, and other products of the forest. The Kuṟumbas, a cluster of at least seven tribes, and the Irulas, a group of probably three tribes, had their own tribal cultures, too. These were less elaborate, less complex, less closed, and less independent (so it seems) of Hindu impact but, nevertheless, their own.

Thus they must have lived for centuries, till the first known disruption occurred with the arrival of the Hindu Badagas speaking a Kannaḍa dialect. It is fascinating to trace how these relative latecomers — a people originally foreign to the Blue Mountains, and with a very different culture — became the most influential, most potent, and most aggressive factor in today's socioeconomic life and even in the administrative structure of the Nilgiri

District. The story, however, has been told elsewhere (Hockings 1979); we shall return to the physical description of the Nilgiris.

The most prominent river of the area is the Bhavani (Bhavānī). Its Irula name is Vāni, and this word signifies any large river; the same usage applies to the Kuṛumba name of the river, Bāni (Toda Pōny, Kota Vāṇy). It marks the southeastern boundary of the Nilgiris, cutting them off from the Coimbatore plains and from the Vellangiri Hills — in short, from the countryside south and east of the mountains, which is designated by the Toda as *kwïg*. The Bhavani plays an important role in the folklore of almost all Nilgiri tribes, is worshipped as one of the manifestations of Devī, Siva's consort, and has her own myth: to free herself from the curse of Siva, Dakṣa's daughter Dākṣāyanī took the form of the river Bhavānī [the Giver of Existence] and now washes off the sins of every person who bathes in her waters.

Another important river and a tributary of the Bhavani is the Avalanche (Irula Muḷḷiyāṛu, 'Thorny River'). In Toda mythology, where it is called Paxfāw, the dead cross this river on their way to the afterworld. The Pykara (Paikāra, Toda Kōlykīn), a relatively short stream that joins the Moyar after the Pykara Falls, is one of the most important Toda deities: Tēpax, the brother of the highest Toda goddess, Tōkiṣy.

The Moyar (Māyāṛu) is the most important river in the northern region of the Nilgiris. It runs through the Mysore Ditch, separating the Nilgiris from Mysore, and enters the Bhavani. It is also one of the rivers flowing through the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary, and its banks are the domain of wild boar, elephant, gaur [Indian bison], and panther. Along its course, and along the many smaller streams that are its tributaries, a number of tribal people live in their ancestral habitats. It was on the banks of the Moyar that I first met, in 1968, the Bëṭṭa and Jēnu Kuṛumbas; it was there that, thirteen years later, I watched with wildly beating heart as a herd of jungle elephants came to drink and bathe; it was there that I saw a group of tribal children poke a huge cobra hidden among the rocks of the stream; it was there that I took some of my first color photographs of tribal women bathing and washing their clothes, and of tribal men fishing.

The Irula territory is bounded in the north by the canyon of the Moyar and in the south by the Bhavani. These two rivers, along with the Avalanche, are considered to be the boundaries of the Ërḷasīme, the Irula country proper. Beyond the rivers lies a world of strangers, of the plainspeople. Rivers and other water sources play an important role in the life and lore of the Nilgiri tribes. There is, for example, a splendid waterfall, called Ulikïḍangu in Irula, in the jungle near Marvahalla Estate, of which many stories are told; it is also the scene of (rare) Irula suicides and has sinister associations for the tribe. The mountains play an even greater role; nearly every mountain, every hill, and every rock in the Nilgiris has its own myth, legend, or tale.

More than twenty peaks tower 8000 feet or more above the countryside. The highest among them, Dodabetta (doḍḍa 'big, principal, great' plus beṭṭa 'high hill, mountain') stands right in the middle of Toda territory. Its Toda name is Peṭmāṣ, and it figures in Toda songs; e.g., "Peṭmāṣāṛ pōn iṭ moȝ" [Over Mt. Peṭmāṣ clouds rise in the sky]. The second and third highest peaks in the Nilgiris are in the Kundah Range: Kolaribetta and Mukurti. The fourth, Snowdon, in the central range, is called Nōṭisy by the Todas, who describe it as "the meeting of the sacred places" and "the assembly of the gods."

For the Todas, many mountains in the Nilgiris are gods. But the Kuṛumbas, too, worship mountains and rocks, and all my data gathered from Nilgiri Irula and Ūrāḷi informants prove the importance of mountains in the religion and mythology of Irula-speaking tribes. It seems that for the Badagas, too, some mountains are gods: for example, the goddess Hette (called EtyoṭyӨöw in Toda), whose mountain is situated in the northeastern part of the plateau. A striking mountain known in English as "Staircase" is called Mupūf [Three Flowers] in Toda, and is connected with a legend about one of the tribe's ancestral heroes, Kwaṭēn. Another important mountain is Kaṛoṛ, near the Tōṛōṛ mund, where there is a ceremonial hut of the Badagas and Kotas. Significant Nilgiri tribal lore surrounds the Hulikal Drug [Tiger-Rock Fort], a peak on the southwest of the path running up from the Mettupalaiyam plains to Coonoor. In Kota it is called Durgveṭ, and according to their legends, it was there that a few 'original' people of the Nilgiris lived in caves, eating *kavḷ* (*Ceropegia pusilla*) bulbs, fruit, and raw flesh. It was there that Kitūrpayk, the culture hero of the Kotas, originated the three 'castes' of Kotas, Todas, and Kuṛumbas.

For the Irulas, the most sacred mountain is the Rangaswami Peak (called in Irula Raṅgaboṭṭu, Raṅgabëṭṭa, Nīlagiriraṅga), which towers above the eastern slopes. It is the seat of the god Raṅga, one of the supreme gods of all Irula-speaking tribes, of whom there exists an interesting myth in several slightly different versions.

There have been accounts of Rangaswami Peak in earlier literature; see, for example, Keys 1812; Grigg et al. 1880; Ouchterlony 1848, cited in Shortt 1869:62. But none of them is detailed enough, or satisfactory. In 1976, I decided to explore the sacred realm of Raṅga, but only in 1978 succeeded in climbing this holiest mountain of the Irulas, which is no doubt the seat of ancestral worship of the original mountain-god of the tribe. It was necessary to obtain the help of an Irula guide and the approval of the authorities in Kotagiri. This took some persuasion, and above all, some time. Rangaswami Peak is situated amongst a countryside of great and dramatic beauty. One begins the ascent from tea plantations below via a narrow path, with the rocky Kaḍaleboṭṭu on the left and the massif of Raṅga's holy mountain on the right side. One merges first into a shola forest (from where wild elephants, bears, and panthers are said to occasionally emerge) and soon enters a deeper forest where, beside a stream, there is the first (lowest) Irula *guḍi* [shrine]. This is made up of two stones with Vaishnava marks, along with spears (*vēl*) and Saiva tridents, under a majestic fruit-bearing *cēlemara* tree, with wild flowers all around, the blossoms of which resemble snakes. During the great annual festival, Irulas gather there in the forest, stay overnight, rest, eat, make fire, and use the waters of the stream.

The ascent proceeds along a narrow path through high grass and some bushes, turns right, and involves some climbing over flat, nearly vertical rocks. One then reaches a small plateau situated toward the north, overlooking the Moyar Valley. Here is the second shrine and the sacred pool. The pool, called Nāmakar, is small and shallow; it is mentioned in earlier literature. There is a stone altar with a stone bearing Vaishnava marks, accompanied again by Saiva tridents. This pattern of vague Vaishnava-Saiva syncretism is visible in all Irula shrines, not only those on Rangaswami Peak. An important conclusion concerning Irula religion follows, denying all earlier accounts: the Irulas are not Vaishnavas; their religion is 'tribal,' i.e., non-Hindu, with vague, indiscriminate Hindu (Vaishnava and Saiva) traits. How confused and superficial the

Vaishnavism of the Irulas is may be seen from the fact that my Irula informant could not answer my question as to a small idol on the top of the peak. When asked whom the idol represented, he hesitated for a long time before saying "Namma Pīḷḷeyāru" [literally, our honored child]. He was thus confusing the Vaishnava deity Krishna with the Saiva Vināyaka (though the term 'honored child' may indeed refer to Krishna, too, further questioning elicited the fact that he was referring to Vināyaka-Gaṇapati).

From there on, one must climb a rather steep slope to reach the top of Rangaswami Peak, where one finds a small plateau. The plateau is delimited as sacred by a cairn that fulfills the function of a temple gopura, or entrance tower. One must remove one's shoes beyond the cairn, which stands before a small statue of the bull and Krishna, who is depicted playing a flute.

The main Irula shrine, opening toward the east, is probably prehistoric in origin, and might then have consisted of two stones, one larger than the other. The stones are said to represent Raṅgacāmi or Raṅga Toga, and to be *svayambhū* [self-originated]. In a stone enclosure whose entrance is marked by two stone slabs and three steps, there stands a *virāli mara* (Jamaica switch sorrel, *Dordonea viscosa*); under it is the stump of the original *imbimara* [lime or lemon tree]. Various-sized *vēls* [Murugan's spears] and *triśūlas* [Siva's tridents] are placed near the trees, while bells donated by Irulas hang from the branches of the *virāli* tree. The following idols stand in front of the tree, facing east: Nandi, Siva's bull; Krishna playing the flute, with bull; one of the two original black stones; Murugan with two consorts on peacock; the main original stone; and another Nandi. The Saiva-Vaishnava syncretism is strikingly apparent. In front of these idols are flat stones on which flowers, fruits, and offerings of food are placed during worship.

Not surprisingly, my attention centered on the main idol, the original Raṅga Toga. This deity is represented by a flat black stone about sixteen inches high, which has been cracked or broken horizontally and then mended. My Irula guide told me that about eight years ago, a white man (presumably an American) kicked the stone and broke off its top with his boot. The Irulas maintain that he died as soon as he reached his country.[5] In accordance with Irula custom, there is a second, smaller stone called *gāvutoga* (*gāvu* = ritual sacrifice) on top of which blood (*netaru*) is applied during animal sacrifice, since the main Toga representing Raṅga is too sacred to be touched.

From all that I have seen and heard concerning Rangaswami Peak, one may conclude that this handsome mountain, situated in the heart of the Mele Nāḍu country amidst dramatic scenery, has been the site of worship since very early times. The worship was originally purely tribal (non-Hindu), and in agreement with structures and forms found elsewhere, such as erected flat stones *à deux*, tree-worship, mountain tops, local myths to a large extent specific and original. Later — probably rather recently, judging by the nature of the accretions — a layer of superficial Hinduization of mixed Vaishnava-Saiva character was applied to the worship, and the god was called Raṅga. This Hinduization is manifested by the addition of statues (*cele*) of Krishna, Murugan, and Nandi, and by the placement of spears and tridents (not to mention votive inscriptions in Tamil on the donated bells!) However, the worship has preserved a number of old features, and so have the myths, as we will see.

Fig. 2: View of Rangaswami Peak from the jungles of Garkiyur

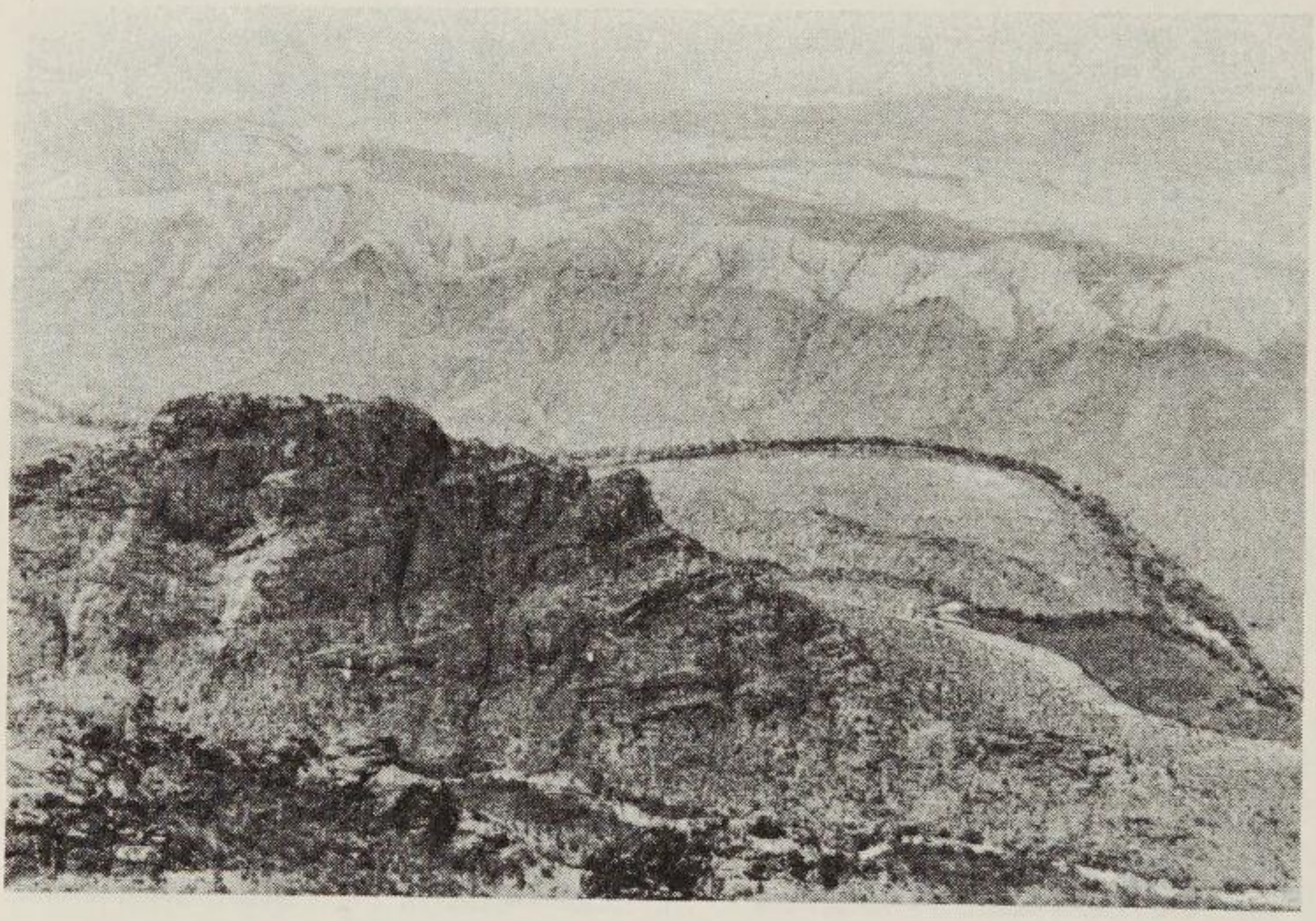


Fig. 3: Mysore Ditch

At some distance, and roughly northwest of Rangaswami Peak, is a very striking needlelike rock known to Westerners as Rangaswami Pillar. Not surprisingly, the Todas, Kotas, and Irulas all have origin stories for this conspicuous rock. According to the Todas, their culture hero Kwaṭöw split open the head of Kōr⊖öw with a bamboo. Kōr⊖öw then chased Kwaṭöw, who ran along the edge of the plateau to reach shelter under the mountain Kwïṛïṇḍöw. When he reached the mountain Pïṛeṣy, he cut a piece of it off with a blow of his hand, so that a chasm divided the two antagonists. Kōr⊖öw kicked and struck one of the cliffs but then returned, while Kwaṭöw got up on the wall-like cliff and showed that he was a god and was recognized as one by Kōr⊖öw. The rock that was split off from Pïṛeṣy is Rangaswami Pillar.

According to the Kota account, Rangaswami Pillar is called Koṭērvikīṇkal [Father Koṭērviky's Rock]. The culture hero of the Kotas, Koṭn alias Koṭērviky, became "as tall as about three of four blue-gum trees," standing "like a pestle which someone has stood up and placed," transformed into a big rock so that people would not forget him.

Finally, in Mele Nāḍu Irula lore, the Pillar Rock is called Kōṇaga. It is connected with the pan-Irula (and Shōlega) myth of Kārayya, Billayya, and Mahādēsvarasvāmi. The motif of kicking and splitting off a rock that became Rangaswami Pillar connects the Irula and Toda mythologies and either is a diffusion of mythological features (from Toda to Irula, I would presume), or a mytheme in the complex of Nilgiri areal features.

The variety in size and shape of the hills in the Nilgiris is reflected in the wealth of Irula vocabulary. Thus, mountain ranges and blocks are called *mele*, which is also the term for mountain, per se. A big mountain is *bëṭṭu, böṭṭu, boṭṭu,* or *bëṭṭa*, depending on the dialect; whereas a hill is *guḍḍe*, and *giri* designates a mid-sized mountain. Rock is *ërṛe* (usually referring to large, flat rocks), but a very large rock, a rocky slope, is *vere*. A slope is *carivu*; a steep slope is *aḍame*; and a very large, steep slope or a large, steep hill is called *ḍïguru*. A slope that is so steep that it is nearly or completely vertical is termed *ceṅgattu*. As can be expected, all Nilgiri tribal languages manifest this ability to reflect the diversity and variety of the physical profile of the Nilgiris in their vocabulary. One last example comes from Jēnu Kuṛumba, the language of the elephant drivers of Mudumalai. Their language distinguishes among four types of forest paths (besides which, of course, they have a number of words for "way," "road," and so on): a jungle path leading from human habitations into the forest is *kāḍudāri*, an elephant path is *ānedāri*, a cattle path is *danadāri*, and a path for humans is *cïnnadāri*.

Four seasons can be distinguished in the Nilgiris: the drier season (December-March); the hot season with the so-called mango showers (April-May); the rainy season with the big western monsoon (June-August); and the subsequent rainy season with the less violent eastern monsoon (September-November). The lowest temperatures are recorded in December and January, while April and May are the hottest months. The Irulas, too, distinguish among four seasons: *panikāla*, or the cold season (November-January); *vicilkāla*, or the hot season (February-May); *mäkāla*, or the rainy season (June-August); and *udurkāla*, or autumn (September-November). The term *udurkāla* literally means 'leaves-falling season.'

There are as many as ten different ecotypes in the Nilgiris — in addition to areas cleared for habitation or cultivation, and scattered bamboo thickets — which derive from the composition of the soil, different microclimatic conditions and different types of vegetation. These ecological differences

ALLEGHENY COLLEGE LIBRARY

play an important role in the ethnic and anthropological picture of the area. There are moist deciduous forests, covering Wynaad and western Nilgiri slopes up to a height of about a half mile; here the dominant timber trees are teak, axlewood, and *Terminalia*. In the dry season, these forests assume a parched, brownish appearance. Western tropical evergreen moist forests cover the western slopes from about 1600 to 3900 feet, while subtropical evergreen moist forests rise above them and form a transitional zone to the temperate forests (sholas). They extend to about 5900 feet.

Dry, deciduous forests occur in the Wynaad, and their remnants may be found on the eastern slopes. Here, teak and axlewood are the dominant species. Savanna woodlands are found on the dry northern slopes and in the Mysore Ditch. The dominant tree is red sander, with scattered sandalwood, axlewood, and teak trees and an occasional acacia. The savanna grasslands occurring alongside all tropical and subtropical types are the result of biotic disturbances in the forested areas. In the lower altitudes of the eastern Nilgiri slopes, large tracts are covered by shrub savannas colonized by lantana grass, small palms, and shrubby bracken. Cleared tracts in dry and most deciduous forests are frequently colonized by different kinds of bamboo. A large area covered by bamboo thickets extends from the Nilgiri massif across the Mysore Ditch into Karnataka State. These shrub savannas and bamboo thickets are inhabited by panthers, snakes, and occasionally tigers.

Above 5900 feet, one finds the typical temperate forests known as sholas, separated by grasslands and agricultural clearings. Numerous tree species distinctly temperate in type grow here in cool, dark forests reminiscent of those in Central Europe. Temperate grasslands above 5900 feet are characterized by grasses kept short by annual fires and by continuous grazing of livestock. Besides grass, other plants ranging in size from small herbs to short trees are found on the grasslands. Blossoming *Strobilanthes* (conehead) species periodically color large slopes with their blue flowers. There are also bracken, rhododendron, eucalyptus, and black wattle trees, the last two native to Australia. This, and only this, is the land of the Todas and Kotas.

Finally, close, thorny thickets occur in parts of the Mysore Ditch on the lower eastern slopes. The dominant trees are acacias and various thorny bushes. Where biotic influences have been intense, there are now discontinuous thorny thickets. The eucalyptus may be associated not only with characteristic flora and fauna but also with the dominant population. The great diversity of climatic conditions, types of soil, and vegetation on a relatively small area is reflected in the almost equally diverse and variegated ethnic patterns of the Nilgiris.

# Notes

[1] W. A. Noble, "Cultural Contrasts and Similarities Among Five Ethnic Groups in the Nilgiri District, Madras State, India, 1800-1963" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1968); Gerard F. Diffloth, "The Irula Language, a Close Relative of Tamil" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1968). However, Diffloth's dissertation, which was produced by microfilm-xerography, did not actually appear until 1969, and Noble's dissertation, produced by the same technique, was made available as late as 1978.

[2] "Modré hory a jejich obyvatelé" (Blue Mountains and their peoples, in Czech), *Nový Orient* 9, no. 4 (1954): 49; "Hospodářské a společenské vztahy nílagirských kmenů" (Socioeconomic relationships among Nilgiri tribes, in Czech), *Československá ethnografie* 3, no. 3 (1955): 236-48.

[3] The name means Blue (*nīla-*) Mountains (*giri-*). It was mentioned as early as A.D. 1117 in a Kannaḍa inscription. But even before that the mountains appear to have been an object of reverence to the Hindus for a long time because of their height and inaccessibility. Many variations of the name occur, among them Nīlagiri, Nīlgiri, Nilgiri(s), Neilgherries, Neelgerry. The name is usually attributed to the blue haze that almost constantly envelopes the mountains, or the periodical blossoming of the conehead (various *Strobilanthes* species) that covers the slopes in large patches of purple and blue.

[4] British Museum Add. MS. 9853, vol. 25-26:464-65.

[5] The news of his demise apparently reached the Irulas through the Panchayat office at Aracode.

# 2

# The Irula Country

One of the wonderful properties of the Nilgiri area is the cultural polyvalence and wealth of every single place in the mountains whether it be a hill, a stream, a forest, a waterfall, a rock, or even a big tree or stone. Everything is connected with one or another tribal culture by a story, a legend, or a myth. Every place is culturally significant; there are no anonymous places. Very frequently, a rock or hill or valley or hamlet is important in the culture of several tribes or communities simultaneously.

A good example of this is Mt. Kaṛoṛ near Toda Tōṛōṛ mund. This place has cultural and ritual significance for at least five tribes: Todas, Kotas, Badagas, Irulas, and Kasabas. Mt. Kaṛoṛ, or Tïṭxaṛoṛ as the Todas call it, is a place where both Badagas and Kotas conduct ceremonial, ritual deer hunts once each year. Before the hunt, they go to Tōṛōṛ mund where the Toda priest from the local dairy brings butter, which they smear on their spears. After the hunt, which takes place in a thicket called Ïṛkwïṛ, they worship at the Irula temple of Mariamma at Bokkapura, an old Irula-Kasaba settlement. Thus, in this ritual event, we can see the participation of five different tribes, in a neat interaction.

Mt. T̈ōxāṣ is also important to various of the Nilgiri tribes. Also called Peṭ⊕ōxum and Mōnguḍy, it is the Toda god who starts the southwest monsoon and is also sacred to the Kuṛumbas and the Irulas. There is also Ōḍōn, a thicket on Mt. Tēkoṣ near the Pālu Kuṛumba village of Pōny. The mountain is important in Toda folklore since it represents a woman connected in legend with the Toda culture-hero Kwaṭēn. The tree *Acronychia laurifolia* grows very tall there, and the tree is culturally important to the Kuṛumbas, who make funeral poles from it. Thus, Ōḍōn is significant to both the Todas and the Kuṛumbas.

This feature of the Nilgiris reminds us of the basic property of Toda culture: its closeness, elaboration, and intensity. The Nilgiri area is relatively small, with a rich, complex tribal population. It is no wonder that

every physical feature of the hills is culturally important, relevant, and rich in elaborate associations.

Roughly speaking, the Irula country proper (*ërḷacīme*) is a belt of jungles, forests, and clearings at an approximate altitude of half a mile to a mile, situated on the northeastern, eastern, southeastern, and southern slopes of the Nilgiris and in a few valleys cutting into the southwestern and western slopes. It should be stressed that the Nilgiri Irulas emphatically do not live on the mountain plateau itself or down under the slopes in the plains; nor do they live in the northern and northwestern parts of the mountains, save for the small Kasaba tribe.

The Irula country is, predominantly, lush green jungle. Coffee and tea plantations — mainly coffee — have made inroads into Irula forests; so has, in some places, Badaga agriculture. In ecologic terms, the Irulas live in moist deciduous forests, moist evergreen forests, savanna woodlands, grasslands, and shrubs, rather than in the temperate grasslands or sholas. Hence, they live in close symbiosis with such trees as teak, axlewood, mesua, champak, and sandalwood, and also with reed bamboos, climbing palms, giant creepers, acacias, lantana grass, and euphorbias. The Irula countryside is never flat; there are deep valleys and dangerous ravines, enormous rocks and long steep slopes, a wealth of rivers and streams, and waterfalls and ponds. Some Irula settlements are built on rather steep slopes, although they are never so inaccessible or situated on such precipitous slopes as the small hamlets of the Kuṟumbas. With exceptions, the country of Mele Nāḍu [Upper Land] and Vëṭṭe Kāḍu [Outer Forests] Irulas is very attractive, and there are places of dramatic, breath-taking beauty, such as the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu settlement of Muḷḷi across the Kerala border, or the village of Garkiyur.

Thus, the Irulas, like other Nilgiri tribes, live in a land of complicated topography. All Nilgiri tribals are subject to topographic constraints, but this variegated, beautiful, often quite splendid countryside is also a source of joy and inspiration to them. So it was to me when I first came to the Nilgiris in 1968 after being introduced to a Toda woman, Evam (Īfam) Beryl Piljean, at the Second International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies. As soon as the gathering was over, I went to the mountains, flanked by Evam and Mrs. Kokilam Subbiah, a very dear Tamil friend and later my assistant at the University of Chicago. For the first time, I actually saw the Irula country, first met 'my' Irulas face to face. When I heard them speak, I was almost unbearably excited; I felt that my hunch about their language had been correct. Irula was an independent tribal language with some rather archaic features, very close to Old or Middle Tamil, but certainly **not** a Tamil dialect! I threw myself passionately into the investigation of *ërḷanāya*. At Kōyikere (Kolikkarai) and at Kūnjapeṇe (Kunjapanai) near Kotagiri, with Evam's and Kokilam's invaluable assistance, I was able to gain the Irulas' confidence and help them begin to overcome their shyness and their debasing attitude toward their own language and culture.

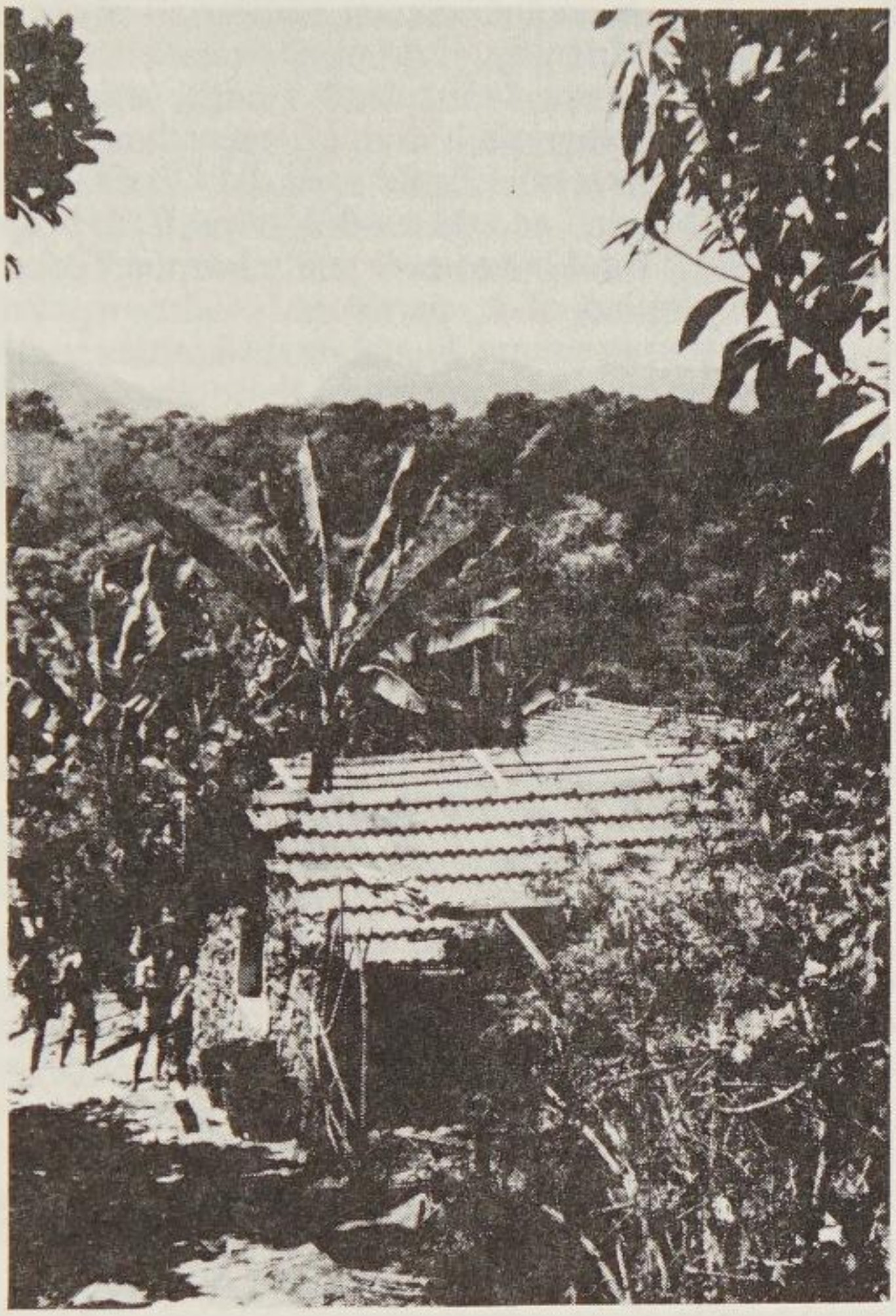


Fig. 4: The Mele Nāḍu Irula village of Kūnjapeṇe

Thanks to Evam, I also had my first, unforgettable impressions of the Todas and their immensely difficult language. I stayed at Pojōrm (Ootacamund) and went to a Toda *nōym* [tribal assembly]. I was introduced to many Toda men and women, almost all of them handsome and **all** of them definitely friendly. I drank their excellent tea — strong, sweet, light brown, milky; I saw their splendid, huge, semi-wild buffaloes; I was even allowed to photograph a diviner, even though I was an *ars* [white man]. I began to repeat after Evam such short Toda sentences as *aⓇ naş kūx* "she's a beautiful girl" and *ōn maⓇračşn pïnfōṛm pozpini* "I came last week from Madras." But I have never really learned Toda. Although I enjoy immensely the sound of it, particularly when spoken by Toda women, I have found it unconquerable and its difficulties insurmountable. Judge for yourself while trying to pronounce these words: *kijⓇwiḷfody* [a tinkling elbow bangle]; *töttïtušⓇ* [lighting of fire on hill]; *uɬgwïş* [inner room of dairy]; or perhaps this jewel of a proper name, Mūnbōwxwïṭṇ. Toda is an esoteric tongue.

In 1968, the picture of the tribal situation in the Nilgiri region was very inadequate and rather confused. This confusion did not pertain to the upper Nilgiri plateau — the areas inhabited by the Todas, Kotas, and Badagas (as well as the many immigrants from the plain of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Kerala) — but rather to the lower jungles and valleys, the barely accessible ravines, and the ring of low forests surrounding the massif proper. No one really knew how many tribal communities lived there, or what languages they spoke. Published accounts were rare, mostly outdated, and completely inadequate.

The picture as it was in 1968 seemed hopelessly complicated to me, too. My time was severely limited. I was overwhelmed by the deep impressions, awed by the wealth of linguistic, anthropological, and cultural data that waited to be gathered and classified. I tried to sift out what I had gathered with the assistance of Evam and Kokilam, and with the help of a rather primitive (but solid) battery-operated tape recorder. I had worked in two different areas: one inhabited by Mele Nāḍu Irulas along the main bus route from Mettupalaiyam to Kotagiri, and another by the tiny tribe of Kasabas. In the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary, I had a brief glimpse of Kāḍu Nāyikas [the lords of the forest] who are employed there as elephant mahouts. My confusion only increased when I was confronted with the Shōlegas and Paṇiyans and some Kuṛumbas who, I think now, were Bëṭṭa and Jēnu Kuṛumbas.

In spite of my confusion and the almost unmanageable wealth of impressions, I felt exultant and returned triumphantly to my home base, the Oriental Institute in Prague. At once I began to go through my Irula and Kasaba data, and I proudly announced later that year that a 'new' independent tribal language, Irula, had been added to the South Dravidian branch of the Dravidian family (1968:94-95).

The political disaster of 1968 in Czechoslovakia and my subsequent exile and search for a new permanent home, together with heavy duties, were the reason why the earliest scholarly fruits of my first field trip into the Nilgiris began to appear in print only five years later. Still, Irula studies were truly born in 1968.

Since that time, I have performed fieldwork in seventeen settlements, hamlets, or villages in the Blue Mountains: Kūnjapeṇe, Kōyikere, Sundapaṭṭi, Kaḷampaḷḷa, Garkiyūr, and Mārvahalla Estate (Mele Nāḍu or 'Upper Country' Irulas); Barliyār, Muḷḷi and Mēle Muḷḷi, Gaṇḍūr, and Suraṇḍi (Vëṭṭe Kāḍu or 'Outer Forests' Irulas); Vāṯōṭṭa and Ānegaṭṭi

(Kasabas); Būdimāḍu and Gundri (Ūrāḷis); Masaṇiguḍi (Kasabas, Kāḍu Nāyikas, and Shōlegas); and Teppakāḍu (Kāḍu-Nāyika-Jēnu Kuṟumbas and Bëṭṭa Kuṟumbas). On the whole, I worked with at least twenty-five Irula-speaking informants in addition to at least five who belong to other tribes. Some of the Irulas were unforgettable: young P. Sivaraj, my best informant because (or although) he was the best educated; Bīmä, the shrewd, well-informed, energetic shaman-priest of Kūnjapeṇe, who possessed a great sense of humor; the old Masaṇa Mēstiri, who tells obscene stories with great gusto; old Rāmä, who died before he could properly elucidate the creation-myth he had given me; and handsome, buoyant Gauramma of Barliyār. There were also the Kasaba boy Beḷigiri; the splendid Ūrāḷi Rāyappan, with his tremendous gift of oratory; the priest of Garkiyūr, with 'his' demoness; Pāppammā of Gundri, who dances as energetically as she talks; and a number of others.

Working with so many informants in a relatively large number of settlements has its disadvantages, although from the point of view of representativeness and verifiability, it is certainly preferable to working with one informant. The conditions under which I gathered and taped linguistic and anthropological/sociological data were often agonizingly inadequate: a lot of noise (children screaming and shouting; other people laughing, interrupting, singing; animal noises in the village or the jungle), and the informants' mumbling, shyness, bad speech habits, and speech impediments. I never worked in 'laboratory' conditions, in the complete privacy of my own home, with one notable exception. In 1981, I persuaded P. Sivaraj to come all the way from his Nilgiri Irula village (and his new wife) to Madras, where he stayed at my hotel for two weeks. On the whole, however, I am happy that I did my work in so many places and with so many informants.

Let me recapitulate the general conditions. When I began my fieldwork, ethnographers knew of the existence of several Kuṟumba communities in very vague and imprecise terms. None of the Kuṟumba languages had been described. The Irulas were known as a single, undifferentiated 'primitive tribe.' The Shōlegas and Paṇiyans, too, had been mentioned — but only mentioned — in print. But no one knew, for example, whether the Ūrāḷis indeed lived in the larger Nilgiri area, or what language they spoke. No one knew who were in fact the Muḍugas, who often refer to themselves as Kuṟumbas, or whether the Kasabas were a separate tribe or an Irula-speaking community. Not one among these tribal languages had ever been described, not even in the most superficial typological terms.

My most intensive research was performed in the Mele Nāḍu Irula territory, in three relatively easily accessed villages. Kūnjapeṇe, twelve miles from Kotagiri, is a well-developed settlement with wells, a residential school for tribal children, a dispensary, and a crèche. It is also the settlement most often visited by non-Irulas, including curious Americans and Europeans. The headmaster of the school is a Badaga, Mr. Bojan, a quiet and helpful man. My friend and informant P. Sivaraj originates from, and lives in, Kūnjapeṇe, where he teaches in the school.

Kōyikere [literally, Cock River; Kolikarai] is not far from Kūnjapeṇe. One must walk, albeit comfortably, for some fifteen or twenty minutes, passing through coffee plantations and forests to reach the village on the bank of a rivulet (*kere*). This settlement, too, is well developed; it is very important because of its small, efficiently run hospital, founded by the unforgettable Dr. Narasimhan. It was here that I was given an Irula name; on January 21, 1976, I came to be called Taṅgapallä 'Golden-Toothed

Person.' In those days, I had a golden front tooth, which seemed a striking thing to the Irulas, who viewed it as a kind of embellishment, like a jewel.

Finally, there is Sundapaṭṭi, a monoethnic settlement of about thirty homes and about 120 inhabitants. It is roughly opposite Kūnjapeṇe, up the hill. From Sundapaṭṭi, one has a marvelous view of the jungles and gorges of the Irula-Kuṟumba territory.

Another area where I investigated the Upper Country Irulas was the northeastern region of low, dry jungles between the Mysore Ditch proper and the mountain slopes: a difficult, wild country. One must first proceed by a tottering bus to Tengumarahada, a place that well illustrates the Badaga expansionism and diligence. This was originally an extremely dry, savanna-like territory, scarcely inhabited and the scene of great devastation in the eighteenth century by the armies of Sultan Tippu. The Badagas moved in, and today irrigation from the perennial river Moyar enables intensive cultivation of two paddy crops each year.

From Tengumarahada, one must take a bullock cart, since the roads beyond cannot be managed even by a jeep. This means five miles of acute suffering in a jolting cart on the bumpy road, crossing several stream beds in dry heat, and looking out with understandable anxiety for fresh elephant dung. This is the country of wild elephants, panthers, and snakes. There are hundreds of abandoned ant hills on each side of the road, ant hills which now house the deadly king-cobra. Finally, one reaches Kaḷampaḷḷa (Kalampalaiyam), a monoethnic Irula settlement situated against a backdrop of awe-inspiring mountains, with Rangaswami Peak in the distance. Once, after a fitful sleep disturbed by a herd of wild elephants, I spent a wonderful morning with very interesting informants; the only things that spoiled my joy were the terrible heat and the pox (though I have never known whether it was smallpox or chicken pox that then infested the village).

Still, my favorite Upper Country Irula village is Garkiyur (Garikkiyoor, Gaṟikkeyūru), in the very heart of Irula territory. There is no direct connection, even by bullock cart; one must walk about an hour to an hour and a half from the minibus station called Kōttimoke. The village is situated on the northern slope of the holy Rangaswami mountain, not far from the top, though the summit is absolutely inaccessible from the village. Garkiyur overlooks magnificent gorges and ravines with rich vegetation, and the opposite slope is dotted with Irula settlements. Most of Garkiyur's inhabitants are typical 'pure' Mele Nāḍu Irulas: the men are short, sometimes very short, and thin, but wiry and strong; and the women are small, even tiny, and sturdy, with delicate features. The people are very dark, with pronounced Australoid-Negrito features (thick black hair, wavy to curly; high cheekbones; long skulls; flat noses; thick, dark lips; receding chins).

They all speak good Mele Nāḍu Irula. The children speak it, too, knowing the names of all the trees, plants, and animals in Irula and distinguishing them precisely from the Tamil forms. Thus, when I discussed the local vegetation with the children and called a jack-tree by its Tamil name (*pālamarō*), they corrected me by saying *cakkemara*, which is good Irula. There is a small school, built in 1978. The two non-Irulas in the village are employed there: Mr. A.V. Selvadurai (a Tamilian), the teacher, and Lakshmana (a Kannaḍiga married to an Irula woman), the janitor-cum-cook. Mr. Selvadurai told me, "At school we teach the children only Tamil and in Tamil. But as soon as they are out of school, they speak Irula, which is culturally good but educationally bad." Bless these Irula children of Garkiyur!

The village is part of the large Aracode area, which also comprises the settlements of Rekkōṭu (Aracode), Nandipura, Pālamokke, Kārepeṇe, Veṟiṅgal, Baṅgalapodige, and Kokkōḍu. According to the 1971 census, this area had 954 Irula inhabitants. Thus, Garkiyur probably forms the densest single cluster of Mele Nāḍu habitations. Its biggest attraction, however, for the Irulas and for me, is its *pēyguḍi*, or 'devil-shrine,' and Badirän, the *būjāri* 'shaman-priest.' The *pēy* is a very powerful demoness, and the priest is a very important person. They deserve special attention and will be discussed in detail later in this book. In addition, Badirän's importance increased when his sister married a white plantation owner, Dixon Dore. This couple's four children speak both English and Irula but consider Irula their mother-tongue.

Not all of my excursions into Mele Nāḍu Irula territory were fruitful, however. One day an Indian Capuchin friar took me to the narrow valley of the Baragada River beyond the Mārvahalla Estate. He promised me 'very primitive' Irulas, still living in caves like prehistoric people. We saw the splendid waterfall called Ulikïḍaṅgu [literally, Waterfall-ditch] and discovered illegal manufacturing of a liquor made from the bark of the *vēṅkai* tree. But of the Irulas, there was no trace. Finally, we found a group of miserable, Kasaba-speaking Irulas in a dry jungle not far from the waterfall, guarding Badaga cattle. They were very poor, uncommunicative, and unfriendly, but not primitive. Only one of them, an old man, had stories to tell about animals. Among other things, he told me of his dispute with a rogue elephant. "All animals are open to truth," he told me. "When this wild beast approached my hut, I reasoned with him. 'I am not going to harm you,' I said. 'I don't wish you any harm. So please do not harm me.' Animals know when truth is spoken. I patted its back and it went."

On March 7, 1978, I went into the Attapadi Valley for a few days with the 'other' Irula community, the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas. One descends, and descends, down to the Kerala-Tamilnadu border, then across into Kerala State. One finally reaches a gorgeous valley with beautiful scenery: the Irula settlement of Muḷḷi. There is a Roman Catholic convent, a small church on a steep hillock, a few Franciscan sisters of Holy Mary, and a dispensary. Somehow, Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas are different from the Mele Nāḍus, though it is difficult to spell out the difference in precisely formulated terms. Many of them are handsome, particularly the old women. Many of them are still traditionally dressed in *vaṇṇas* of dark, glowing colors, and some wear very old, beautiful, traditional silver jewelry. They seemed to me to be darker, more 'tribal' in appearance, with more pronounced Negrito features; they also seemed more energetic, more passionate — even violently so — than the Upper Country Irulas. So it is with the countryside. Wild bison, bears, and elephants abound and are a daily sight. The slopes are higher and steeper, the jungles denser, the rains and winds more violent.

There is also a pronounced Malayali influence, and there is (unfortunately) strong Naxalite agitation. I was surprised to find some men among them who were politically very radical, professing a very odd mixture of atheist Trotskyite anarchist Marxism coupled with various 'tribal' views. The most rewarding experience I had in the Aracode region was an encounter with my oldest informant, the chieftain of Upper Muḷḷi, who was 102 years old. He gave me an interesting version of their creation myth, with the motifs of flood, floating gourd, incest prohibition, and origin of clans.

Fig. 5: The Mele Nāḍu Irula village of Garkiyur

Fig. 6: Primitive Irula hut in the jungle near Marvahalla

Fig. 7: A Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irula woman from Muḷḷi, Kerala (1978)

In the borderland of three Dravidian-speaking states, Tamilnadu, Kerala and Karnataka, there is a large area comprising three contiguous wildlife sanctuaries: Mudumalai, Bandipur-Nagerhole, and Wynaad. A recent survey estimates the tiger population at 20 to 30, and the elephant population at more than 700; in addition, there are a dozen or more tame elephants and a great number of bears, wild boars, Indian bison, sambars, deer, antelopes, flying squirrels, jungle cats, and so on. This is also the area where I performed my first field research into the language of the very small tribe (about 450 to 800 souls) called Kasabas. (They are also called Kasavas, Kasubas, Kasuvas and, in older records, Kashubas.) It it my opinion that they speak a dialect of Irula. In 1968, with the aid of Mrs. Kokilam Subbiah, I visited a few Kasaba hamlets and recorded the speech of an old chieftain and his very intelligent grandson, Beḷigiri. The boy spoke Tamil and Kannaḍa, in addition to Kasaba Irula, and was a mine of grammatical and lexical data. When I visited the village again eight years later, I was told that he had died of typhoid.

One of my most thrilling adventures was my discovery of the Ūrāḷis. "Ūrāḷi" [literally, the lord of the town/village] is a term that applies to a number of South Indian tribes. Two of these are briefly described in the ethnographic classic, E. Thurston and K. Rangachari's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909). G.F. Diffloth writes, "Ūrāḷi is also very common as a community name in South India, but I found that the Ūrāḷis living near Satyamangaḷam have the same proper names for designating the numerous caste subdivisions as do the Nilgiri Iṟuḷas" (1968:12). Diffloth suggests that a connection can be proposed between the Irulas and "some Ūrāḷis." Since he mentions (Ibid., 15) his own linguistic data (but does not quote any), he must obviously have investigated some Ūrāḷis residing somewhere "near Satyamangaḷam," but he has never published anything about them.

Prompted by the vague reports by Thurston-Rangachari and Diffloth, I resolved even before my third field trip (1978) that I must get in touch with the Ūrāḷis and solve the riddles of their speech and their tribal affinity. In the beginning, I was completely unsuccessful. No one — not even the Madras anthropologists and officials in the Department of Harijan and Tribal Welfare — knew anything about any Ūrāḷis residing in the Nilgiri area. The authorities in the Nilgiri District itself denied the existence of any Ūrāḷis there, as did Dr. Narasimhan, despite his intimate knowledge of Nilgiri tribes.

On February 10, 1978, Sister Sophie of the Franciscan order at St. Mary's Convent in Kotagiri, the village where I had my base, told me quite in passing that she not only knew of the Ūrāḷis but knew them in person and quite well, having cared for them for months! Three days later, she told me that I should go to Gundri, about fifty miles north of Satyamangalam (or Satti, as she called the town), where they lived, cared for by the sisters of her order. There was one problem, however; Gundri could be reached only by jeep or lorry. There was absolutely no other connection, and the jungles around Gundri were infested with wild beasts. Hectic activity followed. Thanks to the kind assistance of the Mother Provincial of the Franciscan Order at Ooty, I was offered a jeep and a driver. With my student/companion and my assistant, Mr. Rajiah, I reached Gundri on March 1, 1978.

Gundri is a multiethnic settlement in the Gobi Taluk, Coimbatore District, at an elevation of about 3300 feet, in the midst of a jungle area full of wild elephants. But the forest has been partially cleared, and the Ūrāḷis lead a settled, quiet, and relatively safe and comfortable life; they are guided

— and to a great extent cared for — by the seven sisters of the Franciscan Order of St. Mary and a Roman Catholic parish priest. At the time of our visit, this priest was a warm, jovial Frenchman originally from Nantes, Father Jean Nouet. We had a most illuminating talk about the Ūrāḷis and their customs, about prehistory and archaeology, and last but not least, about Muscadet wines. All of the nuns at Gundri were Indian; Sister Siria Therèse of Madurai acted as their energetic and able superior.

On March 10, I lunched with the Bishop of Ootacamund, Msgr. J. Aruldas, and was thus able to personally thank him for all the very substantial help the Roman Catholic authorities in the dioceses of Ootacamund and Coimbatore had rendered us. Bishop Aruldas told me that the Catholic parish at Gundri was established as early as 1910, by P. J. Perit.

I gathered invaluable material not only on the language of the Ūrāḷis, which I easily identified as an Irula dialect, but also on their mythology, including a most interesting and complex creation myth. I witnessed genuine possession of one of my informants by the goddess. One unforgettable evening, we took part in tribal dancing and were later ritually accepted as members of the Ūrāḷi community. Thus, since March 3, 1978, I have been an Ūrāḷi, and I am happy and proud to be one.

In Gundri, my best informant was Rāyappan, one of the most memorable and most remarkable tribal men I have ever met. He had an incredible gift of oratory; his eloquence was stunning. He spoke with complete abandon and with a highly dramatic sense of the occasion (like Badirän, the energetic demon-priest of Garkiyur). It was his own suggestion to record his message to his co-tribesmen at Būdimāḍu, a very miserable hamlet of impoverished Ūrāḷis down under the hills not far from Satyamangalam, which I have twice visited. In that message, my companion and I were nearly deified; we were described as the incarnations of very noble personages, descendants of Ūrāḷi kings, virtually Ūrāḷis ourselves in a former existence. Rāyappan said that we had come to the area to deliver the tribe from the great evil that had befallen it: not being recognized as an independent tribal community in an official act issued by the government of Tamilnadu!

These Ūrāḷis of Biligiri-Rangana and the Kambatarayan Hills are lumped together with the neighboring, much larger tribe of the Shōlegas, and they are justly resentful of this. Although there are some deep connections between the two tribes — for example, a common origin myth — the differences are basic and important. The Shōlegas speak a Kannaḍa-like language of their own, while the Ūrāḷis speak an Irula dialect; the Shōlegas are organized in five clans, while the Ūrāḷis have at least seven; and, while both tribes claim descent from the tribal hero Kārayya, there are some critical differences in their ancestor myths. On the whole, I regard my 'discovery' of Irula-speaking Ūrāḷis and the acquisition of their ancestor myth as the most valuable results of my 1978 field trip.

How does one go about investigating a non-literary, unwritten language spoken by a relatively small, backward tribe — a language that has never before been the object of any research?

The first, and most general, rule concerns the ambience: one must see to it that the mood is relaxed, that things go easy. Under no circumstances must the informant be dragged into the artificial, frightening milieu of a language laboratory and confronted with sophisticated recording apparatuses. The data gathered under unnatural conditions are almost certain to be distorted, even false. The ideal situation is, obviously,

completely natural and relaxed; the first contacts must be made in the informant's own environment, where he feels at home and at ease. An indispensable first step is to let the informant do the talking; then one may begin asking questions unobtrusively, almost imperceptibly, in a casual, conversational manner. Fortunately, the Irulas are talkative, unlike the much more reserved Kuṟumbas or Kotas, and when one gains their confidence and friendship, they are even eager to speak about their way of life and their problems.

Then there is, of course, the problem of a scornful and derogatory attitude that many Irulas have toward their own language and culture. Diffloth has described these "exceptionally difficult socio-linguistic conditions" very well. Speaking of the Irulas, he writes that

> Their position, material and social, is quite insecure, and this is reflected in their attitude towards their own language...they consider their language as being just 'bad Tamil.' This widespread stereotype has no linguistic relevance and simply reflects social prejudices. It is perhaps typical of untouchables that Iṟuḷas would endorse these self-degrading stereotypes as if they were factual. As a result of this, my informants tended to yield under the slightest pressure of questioning, and to use Tamil patterns at random without trying to distinguish them from Iṟuḷa patterns. This attitude proved disastrous when I tried to gain some insights into syntax or the semantics of grammatical categories...there was a certain reluctance on the part of my informants to start thinking about their language, or even to judge the grammaticality of utterances presented to them. Ultimately it is difficult to convince a man that this might be an interesting matter when his primary concern is having enough to eat the following day. (1968:6-7)

I have given this lengthy quotation here because I was faced with almost the same problems concerning my Irula informants. I say 'almost' because I had a somewhat better experience, particularly in the more remote settlements like Garkiyur or Kaḷampaḷḷa. Here, the Irulas could (and were willing to) strictly distinguish between forms and words that were Irula and those that were not (e.g., Badaga or Tamil). Nevertheless, a degree of initial shyness, partial reluctance, sometimes even distrust and suspicion, nearly always must be overcome. The rule in such situations is, again, to make the informant relaxed; if necessary, make him laugh about one's own mistakes, mispronunciations, and the like while trying to imitate native words and forms. One must, of course, be extremely careful not to offend; and one must know exactly how far one can press a sensitive point or a sensitive informant for an answer. There are generally two possible reactions on the part of an indigenous tribal informant when he does not know how to answer or when he does not want to answer: he will close up like an oyster, or, wishing to oblige, he will yield to pressure and provide

incorrect information. There is a third alternative, too: deliberately false information. Fortunately, I have met with a deliberate falsification only once, when working, under very adverse conditions, with a Bëṭṭa Kuṟumba boy. However, for this reason, a constant checking and rechecking is a continuous and ever-present necessity. For the same reason, notebooks, pencils, and especially tape recorders should be produced only at a later stage.

In the beginning, one obviously works via a third language; to my knowledge, only one Irula to date, P. Sivaraj, knows English. Thus, the intermediary must be Tamil or Kannaḍa or Badaga, or a combination of these, and this, too, was my approach. In addition (and in this respect I was very lucky), during two of my four field trips I had the invaluable assistance of J. D. Rajiah. A retired Deputy Tahsildar, his mother-tongue was Telugu, but he had spent his whole life in the Nilgiris and was fluent in Toda and Badaga as well as Tamil, Kannaḍa, and English. In my work with the Irulas, his knowledge of Badaga in particular was very helpful, since almost all Irulas know this *lingua franca* of the hills, and it sounds familiar to them — more so than Tamil, which is linguistically closer but culturally and socially more distant.

As soon as one begins to see the structure and the various linguistic systems of the investigated language, something new has been achieved. It all begins to make sense. One has a very rewarding feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment, and one may start to fill in the gaps. As one goes on, one learns the new language itself. In my case, I began to coin my own Irula sentences, to the enormous delight of my Irula informants. They had a lot of fun, and so had I. I could slowly begin to induce them to overcome their own deprecatory attitude toward their language. It filled me with pride to see their attitudes change, and it filled them with amazement and pride to see a white *dore* try hard to speak their despised language.

I began recording narratives — stories, legends, myths — as well as riddles and songs. I was constantly checking grammar, constantly adding to the vocabulary. Finally, I began to understand, study, and even use Irula idioms and sayings, such as *pālillada vāyi kaṇḍade mellugudu* [literally, (It is like) chewing a thing which was found in a toothless mouth] to refer to a nonsensical undertaking.

I certainly did **not** feel that I was performing a nonsensical undertaking. On the contrary, I think it is a noble and rewarding activity to try to rescue a language and a culture that are on the verge of extinction. I cannot say whether, ultimately, the Irulas will cease to exist as an independent ethnic group, as a people. Most probably they will, as we all shall some day; for the pressures of the 'advanced' society around are too strong to resist. But at least they won't disappear without a trace; their language, their attitudes and views, their creativity and verbal art will be preserved, and this knowledge can contribute to our better understanding of Dravidian India and of India's primitive societies.

# 3

# Plants, Beasts, and Birds in Irula Life and Lore

The Nilgiri District is an area of about 984 square miles. Thus, it is about the size of Luxembourg, or Warwickshire or, if you like, slightly smaller than Rhode Island (Hockings 1972:5). And yet, the most characteristic feature of the Nilgiris is their complicated topography, and their tremendous variety of flora and fauna. Apart from native vegetation, a number of plants and trees have been introduced from various parts of the globe — from Europe, the Americas, and Australia, and from tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates.

To realize the enormous importance of plants and trees in the life of the Irulas and other related tribes, one should know that the Irulas grow at least fifty-four species of plants in their gardens. To this, one must add the plants grown in dry fields; wild yams and tubers; mushrooms; wild fruits and herbs; medicinal herbs; barks of trees used for medicinal purposes and to make illicit liquor; and wood and grasses used for many different purposes (fuel, building material, canes, tools, baskets, instruments). All these materials grow locally in the Nilgiris, and it is natural that an Irula still has a very direct, immediate, intimate knowledge of and contact with Nilgiri vegetation.

The four most important foreign plants that have drastically changed Irula life during the last 150 years are eucalyptus, cinchona, coffee, and tea. Eucalyptus species were introduced for different purposes (afforestation, beautification, and economic profit) into the Nilgiris in the mid-1800s. Later, acacias were planted in large numbers for their bark tannin, and eucalyptuses became the source of eucalyptus oil extracted from the leaves. The first blue gums (*Eucalyptus globulus* Labill) were grown in the Nilgiris in 1834 by Cotton. After 1857, they became very common and widely distributed. In our day, the pungent fragrance, blue smoke, and heaps of

blackened oily leaves belong to the Nilgiri landscape as intimately as do tea and coffee plantations.

Cinchona cultivation was begun in 1860 when Sir C. Markham brought plants and seeds from Peru to Ootacamund. The Nilgiris thus became the original home of cinchona in India. Along with coffee and tea, cinchona is a major plantation plant; together, the three covered more than 50 percent of all cultivated land in the Nilgiri District by 1960.

Folklore tells us that a Muslim pilgrim named Bābā-ud-Dīn first brought coffee to India from Mecca in 1600. The Bababudin Hills in Mysore, named for him, were a center of coffee cultivation when the British destroyed Sultan Tippu in 1799. In the same year, the East India Company started an experimental coffee garden at Anjarakandy near Telichery (Kerala State). Plants taken from there were planted in Malabar Wynaad in 1829, and coffee growing may then have spread eastward to Nilgiri Wynaad. The first coffee plantation in the Nilgiris was started in 1838 by Dawson, near Coonoor, and two other plantations were opened during 1840 in the Kotagiri area. Thus, coffee is typically one of the imported plants that spread right into the heart of Irula country. A number of Irulas work as coffee estate laborers in this area and elsewhere. They enjoy drinking coffee very much, as do nearly all South Indians; they call the beverage *kāpi*; the beans, *kāpikoṭṭe*; and ground coffee, *kāpidūḷu*.

In 1832, Surgeon Christie ordered some tea plants from China. He died the same year, but the plants that had arrived were distributed for planting. In 1834, Lord Bentinck sent a commission to China for some tea, and twenty years later, more tea seeds were imported from China. These seeds formed the nucleus of the first tea plantation near Coonoor. By 1883, there were already seventy-eight Nilgiri tea plantations. In 1960, tea covered 32,000 acres on the Nilgiris, and more than 14,660 acres in the Nilgiri Wynaad, with the Assam rather than the Chinese variety being the dominant type. The Irulas and Kasabas work both tea and coffee plantations, and they are more fond of tea than are the South Indians from the plains. The tea plant is called *ṭīgïḍa*; fresh tea leaves are *ṭīkoḷundu*, and dry tea, or tea powder, is *ṭīdūḷu*.

By 1847, Irulas had begun to work occasionally as coolies on coffee plantations. According to Ouchterlony (1849), they were skilled tree fellers and hewers of planks and rafters. By 1868, some Irulas had become quite acculturated, working side by side with imported plantation laborers (Shortt 1869). Around 1900, Irulas, both men and women, were found to be "far more industrious and reliable than Tamil coolies" (Thurston 1909). In point of fact, plantations were often established in localities where Irulas could supply the demand for labor. Some land that the Irulas once used for hunting, food-gathering, and primitive cultivation was covered by plantation crops of coffee and tea. Today, according to Noble (1968), most Irulas of working age are employed on plantations. This evidently has important cultural consequences. On the one hand, Irulas and Kasabas (more than any other tribal people of the Nilgiri area) are lumped together with the mass of coolies imported from the plains, who are almost without exception Tamil Harijans. On the other hand, Irulas tend to imitate precisely these plainspeople by adopting their beliefs, customs, and cultural expressions. Thus, Irula tribal culture undergoes what might be termed "Tamil Harijanization."

Among the other tropical and subtropical plants introduced at various times to the Nilgiris, several play an important role in the Irula diet: papaya, tapioca, grain amaranth, bananas, jacks, limes, lemons, and mandarin

oranges. These are found in such villages as Garkiyur and Barliar, the latter a polyethnic settlement which includes both Mele Nāḍu and Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas as well as Kuṟumbas and Tamils. At Barliar, there is an experimental garden where, as early as 1857, one could see clove, cinnamon, peach, mangosteen, allspice, loquat, nutmeg, orange, passion fruit, pineapple, and vanilla. Cherimoyas, introduced into India in 1860, are frequently grown in Irula and Kuṟumba gardens.

As far as temperate crops and trees are concerned, they were introduced early in the last century, after John Sullivan started construction of the first Englishman's house on the Nilgiris in the Toda settlement Patïr (Ootacamund) in 1819. His gardener grew potatoes in 1824, and in 1826, beets, cabbages, radishes, and turnips. Sullivan also grew barley, oats, and wheat. The Kuṟumbas grew maize in 1868, and buckwheat was flourishing in 1875. According to Noble, the frequent use of broad beans in Badaga ritual "indicates their early presence in the Nilgiris." Thus far, this chapter owes much to his 1968 dissertation, in which he deals in great detail with economic problems.

The one indigenous flower that is most characteristic of the Nilgiris, and which occurs probably in the lore of all tribes living there, is conehead (*Strobilanthes*). Outside the Nilgiris, the common word for this plant is the Tamil *kuṟiñci*. But the Nilgiri languages have their own words, which provide us with what is called an "areal etymology": Toda/Kota *kaṭ;* Badaga *kaṭṭe*; Ālu Kuṟumba *kaṭṭe*; Irula (*ebbu*)*kaṭṭe*. The cultural significance of this plant stretches back at least two millenia, for it was very important in ancient Tamil folklore. Its periodical flowering is its most striking characteristic; whole mountain ranges look hazy blue when the *S. kunthianus* flowers in unison over large tracts of mountain slopes. This striking flowering, indeed, gave the name to the hilly tract itself (*kuṟiñci*), and a whole genre of classical Tamil love poetry ('poems of the mountains') is connected with one of the five ideal landscapes characterized by its flowering. The classical Tamil dictionary *Piṅkalanikaṇṭu* (1917:382) tells us that the term *kuṟiñci* has many meanings, namely one of the five landscapes, a tree, a kind of melody, a kind of harp, and a kind of song. *Strobilanthes* (*Acanthaceae*) is a large woody herb that grows up to six and one-half feet tall; hence, the Tamil dictionary refers to it as a tree. All plants of one species flower simultaneously over large regions, and after flowering, wither away; a new generation grows from the seed, to flower after a period that is fixed and constant for each species and that varies from three to fourteen years.

The flowers themselves range in color from pale lilac blue to deep purple blue, and make the hills appear as if painted blue.[1] In Toda lore, *kaṭ* is said to flower every eighteen years; in two Toda songs, sacred places are mentioned as places where it grows, and a charming love song, in a distinctly erotic context, speaks of the woman as "becoming a *kaṭ* blossom" (Emeneau 1971, song 152). In another song a man sings, "When you blossomed like the Strobilanthes, I sucked like the big bee" (Ibid., song 116, a.24). This decidedly erotic pronouncement is obviously a formula, since it is repeated in several other songs; elsewhere the poet asks, "If a man goes from Pīṟ mund, does she become a Strobilanthes flower and blossom for him?" (Ibid., song 142).

According to Rivers, the Todas observed the cyclic and profuse blossoming of conehead, and individuals used it as a measure of age. Rivers also thinks that the great ritual and mythic significance of the number

eighteen is connected with the Toda belief that one species of *Strobilanthes* flowers once each eighteen years:

> The number of times that several Todas had seen the flowers agreed approximately with their probable ages. Thus, Kutadri [correct: Kwïṭoṛy — K.V.Z.] saw the flowers in 1902 for the third time, having seen them for the first time when he was twelve years old. This would make his age forty-eight, which seemed from other sources of information to be approximately correct...some Todas are reputed to have seen the flowers seven times, which, taking five years as the age when they were first seen, would make them over 110 years. (Rivers 1906:415-16)

In 1976, I saw a very old Toda man, brisk and energetic, who was said to be 105 years old by the *kaṭ* computation.

Among the indigenous trees, the most sacred is *Meliosma pungens* (also *M*. Wightii). Rivers (Ibid., 433-35) mentions it as the Todas' most holy tree. The bark of this sacred tree, called *tïr* in Toda (Rivers called it *tudr*), is said to have purificatory powers; it is used in dairy ceremonials and for the purification of people and objects. In 1968 I witnessed the very complex and protracted ritual of erecting a new Toda dairy-temple; the stone slabs used in its construction were ritually purified with the bark of *tïr*. (See Fig. 8.) Obviously, the sacredness of this tree is a Nilgiri areal feature, since the Pālu Kuṟumbas, who call it *tūḍe*, prepare a kind of 'holy water' from the finely ground bark mixed with fresh cow dung and coconut water.[2] In Ālu Kuṟumba the tree is also called *tūḍe*, as it is in Badaga as well (Hockings). In Irula, the tree is called *tukḍe* or *tūkḍe*; it is considered purifying and is thought to possess magical and medical properties. The Irulas mix its bark or sawdust with water, in which they bathe to remove pollution and various illnesses.

Trees are also connected with various versions of the Rangaswami myth. According to one, recounted by a group of Mele Nāḍu Irulas at Kunjapanai in 1978, two Irulas were gathering grass for broomsticks on the slopes of Raṅgaboṭṭu. In the night, the deity Raṅga appeared to them in a dream and said, "Come up here and worship me." They climbed up and found the deity, Raṅgacāmigiri, sitting under a *koṭṭamara* tree (jujube, *Zizyphus xylophyra*) and worshipped him. Nowadays, however, the main idol on the top of Rangaswami Mountain stands under the stump of a lemon or lime tree (*imbimara*). In the Karaimadai temple, the main deity, a *svayambhū* [self-originated] Raṅga, is a flat, scarred stone under a *kāraimara* tree (emetic nut, *Canthium*), a tree with bitter, slightly poisonous fruit.

Fig. 8: Toda priest with the purifying bark of a sacred tree,
Ootacamund (1968)

Another plant that has significance in Irula folklore is the *culḷipū*, a thorny plant that is identified by a number of botanical terms, among them *Randia dumetorum*. In love songs, it is mentioned as a plant that grows near ponds — for example, a girl takes a bath, a boy asks her to adorn herself with *culḷi* flowers, and she responds by asking him to put wild jasmine blossoms in his hair. Finally, the gooseberry tree (*Phyllanthus emblica*, Irula *nelli mara*) and its edible fruits are said to possess magical and medicinal properties. It appears in the Irula creation myth, for it was eating of this fruit that made the first, cat-like Irulas able to talk in human speech. Wild jack wood (*Artocarpus hirsuta*) and bamboo are culturally important as the materials used to make native clarinets called *koálu* (*kwälü* in Mele Nāḍu Irula, *kogálu* in Vëṭṭe Kāḍu and Ūrāḷi Irula).

One rather important cultural feature should be mentioned in connection with flowers. Many Todas, particularly Toda women, have names that signify some kind of flower or plant. Emeneau collected a group of twenty-one Toda women's names ending in *-pūf* [flower], e.g., Pïnabūf [golden flower] and Tagaşfūf [chain flower]. Among male personal names, one encounters Tafïṭxwïṛ, which according to Emeneau means "Hill Guava + Stream" (Rivers: Tavatkûdr), or Pōşoty [fig tree, *oty*, where milk, *pōş*, is poured].

Among the animals of the Nilgiris, the sloth bear and the elephant are the most feared. The former, *Melursus ursinus* (Irula *karāḍi*) is a vicious, aggressive, dangerous animal; it has probably killed or maimed more tribal inhabitants of the Nilgiris than any other wild beast. During my field trip to Garkiyur, I had the pleasure of an early-morning encounter with this beast while performing my ablutions outside the village proper. The moon was just about to set behind Rangaswami Peak. On the narrow path there was a large boulder that had not been there the day before; suddenly I heard the faint thud of a stone, and the 'rock' began slowly to move in my direction, a black blur, accompanied by the sound of labored breathing, snorting, and snuffling. The sloth bear is supposedly short-sighted and nearly deaf, but I began a fast and silent retreat, turning once to point my flashlight in the direction of the slowly advancing 'boulder.' Its eyes, two red glow-lamps, were unmistakable, but the bear disappeared into the bushes and down a hill, leaving me quite safe.

There is an Irula story about a bear that snatches a girl, whose brothers rescue her with the help of a wasp (which gets into the bear's ears) and a donkey (whose braying makes the bear "dance"). The boys laugh so at the sight of the dancing that the bear is scared away by their long white teeth. The motif of the bear stealing a human female seems to occur quite frequently; in the Nilgiris, it is found in at least two Kota tales. In one, a bear steals a woman, makes her his wife, keeps her captive in a cave, and is killed as the woman is being rescued. There are also songs about the sloth bear in Irula, most of which promise the animal vengeance and death. Some Irulas also claim that one of the songs has the power to attract the bear, leading it to a certain place where they can easily kill it.[3] The following song was given to me by the children of Kūnjapeṇe and checked by P. Sivaraj:

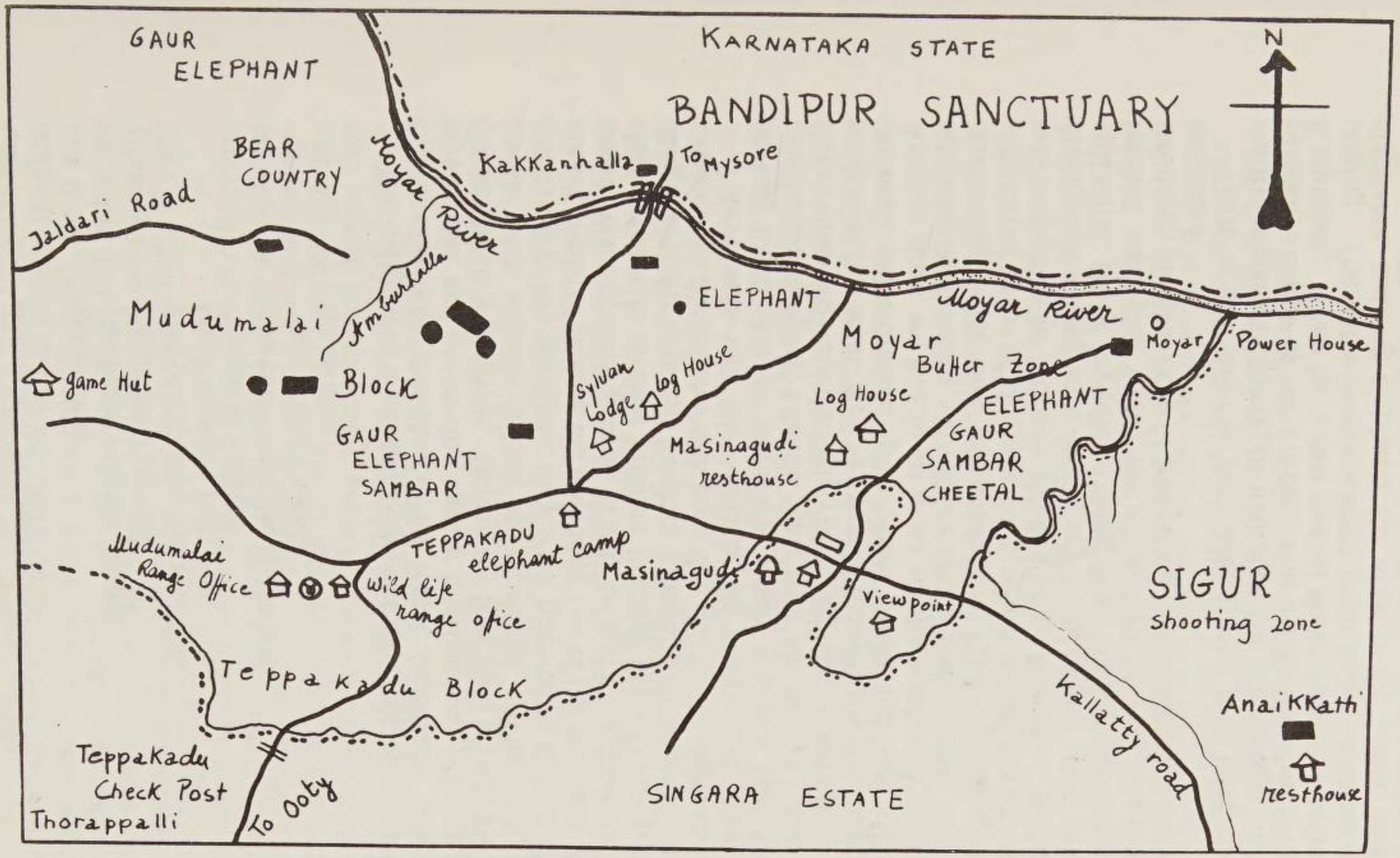
Ho ho ho bear
you bears with the snouts
  searching in the dew
you bears with the big snouts
  sniffing at everything
come, hey, you, come to that ant hill

Ho ho bear
you bears with the snouts
  searching for milk
you bears bothering us, hear,
come straight, hey, you,
  come to Kālkere
you bears with the big snouts
  searching for milk
ho ho bear

The indigenous inhabitants consider the elephant (*Elephas indicus*; Irula *ēne, āne, āne*) the real king of the forest: capricious, dangerous, majestic, mysterious, and possessing human intelligence. Solitary rogue elephants fill the tribals with terror. During my four field trips to the Nilgiris, several Irulas were actually killed by elephants. Whenever elephants were discussed in my presence, they were referred to as part of the real world, not the world of fiction; the hills were full of the accounts of dramatic, often tragic events involving them. It may be that Irula-speaking tribes do not use elephant motifs in their folklore because the animals present a very real danger to them; although I cannot be sure, it did seem to me that to speak of elephants in connection with Irula lore and fiction was almost taboo.

I have seen wild elephants in the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary several times, though always at a safe distance (see Map 2). On two occasions, however, I found these near-encounters rather uncomfortable. Once, when we went through typical elephant country from Satyamangalam to Gundri in a small jeep, we passed many memorial heaps of stones along the road; these marked spots where Ūrāḷis had been killed by elephants. Another time, we had to sit in an elephant-infested forest for nearly two hours while traveling via bullock cart to Kaḷampaḷḷa. On both trips, it was interesting to see how knowledgeable fellow passengers very carefully scrutinized heaps of elephant dung, which indeed has an entire typology. It was important to estimate the degree of freshness, so one must learn to distinguish among an innocent dry heap, falling apart, several days old; a still solid, fairly dry pile of dung from the previous night; a fresh, well-formed mass that warns the traveler to be very cautious; and a shiny, steaming, pungent heap of fresh dung that clearly says Danger! the tusker is next door.

There is one tribe in particular whose men have traditionally been skillful elephant drivers, or mahouts, for generations: the Kāḍu Nāyikas [literally, Lords of the Forest], also called the Jēnu Kuṟumbas [Honey Kuṟumbas]. They have two special skills: honey-gathering and elephant-taming. The latter involves three main tasks: catching and taming wild elephants, training elephants for work in the forest, and riding them as mahouts. The profession is hereditary, and the mahouts "talk" to their elephants in a special language, which I have described elsewhere (1979a:675-76).




Map 2: Sketch Map of the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary

-·-·- Karnataka-Tamilnadu border  · · · Wild Life Sanctuary border  ● Tribal settlement (Kāḍu Nāyikas, Jēnu Kuṟumbas, Bëṭṭa Kuṟumbas)

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*, Irula *puli, püli, pili*) occurs rather often in Irula narrations. It is usually characterized as a dangerous, murderous, but stupid animal, and its stupidity seems to be a pan-Indian folklore motif. The Irula echo-word motif story describes the animal as a silly predator. The shrewd cat and the silly tiger are also contrasted in a Toda narrative. There was a time when the tiger used to watch over the Toda buffaloes during the day, handing over his charge in the evening. One day the tiger was very hungry, and its hunger made it angry. When it brought the buffaloes back, it saw a cat catching a rat. The tiger asked the cat to give it some of the rat's flesh, but the cat said, "There is no fool like you! Why don't you eat some of the buffaloes you look after?" Since then, the tiger has lived in the forest, stealing buffaloes at night (Rivers 1906:431).

There is at least one Irula song — a love song — that mentions the tiger and the panther. It is one of the very few erotic songs in my data:

He went
To hunt in the forest
A tiger or a leopard
A tiger or a leopard
Attack him at night
At night
my *poṇḍikaṟi* [4]
aches

The Todas domesticated the cat long ago, for the earliest writers on the Todas speak of them as keeping those animals. According to Rivers, cats (which the Todas call *kwaty*) are allowed to go wherever they please, including the sacred dairies (just like in Hindu temples). They also appear in Toda ritual, in the great sacrifice of the young male buffalo calf, where the spleen is set aside to be given to a cat. This is apparently so ancient and important a custom that the Toda word for spleen is derived, according to Rivers, from this fact.

There is an Ūrāḷi story in my texts that explains why the cat buries its excrement; in the story, the cat outwits and kills a tiger. Obviously, the two qualities of the cat that strike the Irulas most are its cleanliness and its intelligence.

However, the wild cat is probably the most important animal in traditional Irula lore. While the domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is called *pūne* in Irula, the jungle cat (*Felis chaus* Guldenstaedt) is called *bōka*.[5] This lovely beast, whose color ranges from grizzled fawn to darkish brown with black stripes on the legs and near the tail, likes lower marshy ground with plenty of cover; therefore, it is also called swamp cat. Its ears have short black tufts somewhat like those of the lynx and caracal. According to one of the Irula creation myths, the jungle cat was the direct ancestor of the Irulas, for it was from a pair of these cats that the Irulas 'developed' — with the help of Rāma and Sītā, the monkey Rāmanti, and the magic fruit of the *nelli* tree.

The two animals that appear most frequently in Irula tales are the fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*, Irula *guḷḷanäri*) and the jackal (*Canis aureus*, Irula *näri*). In agreement with the pan-Indic tradition, these animals are cunning and fortunate in their undertakings. The jackal and fox stories are told often and are much appreciated, and their shrewdness is sympathetically admired.

Many larger animals occur in Irula lore: the Indian bison, or gaur (*Bibos gaurus*, Irula *doḍḍu*); the buffalo; the wild pig; and the crocodile. The

buffalo (Irula distinguishes between *kōṇe* 'male buffalo' and *erume* 'female buffalo') appears as a good-natured giant; it feeds orphaned children and is stolen by the Muḍugas. There is also a somewhat obscene anecdote about the buffalo. In a village lived two people; one had a male buffalo and the other, a female. The female buffalo gave birth to a calf. The two buffaloes were standing side by side; the calf, not knowing who was the mother, sucked the penis of the male buffalo. Hence, the owner of the male buffalo claimed the calf. A tribal council was convened and a fox summoned as witness by the owner of the buffalo-cow. The fox rolled itself in black charcoal and came to the council all "burnt"; there it said that it had just come from the burning sea, the fire of which it had quenched. When the people laughed at the impossibility of the sea burning, the fox said, "It is equally impossible that a male buffalo gives birth to a calf."[6]

For the Todas, the buffaloes have central importance of the greatest magnitude. Indeed, the entire tribe is organized according to the ritual organization of its buffalo herds, dairies, and ritualized dairy operations. Buffaloes are divided into the nonritualized, profane buffaloes and the sacred buffaloes. Women are allowed no contact at all with the sacred herds and dairies. The sacred buffaloes and dairies are carefully guarded; they are considered divinities. The Toda language also distinguishes between female, sacred buffaloes (*ïr*) and male buffaloes (*ēṛ*). Every adult female buffalo has an individual name, usually given when her first calf is born, but males are unnamed. The first buffaloes were created by one of the great Toda gods, Ön, and his wife. The Toda buffalo is a variety of the Indian water-buffalo, but the life on the hills "seems to have produced a much finer animal than that of the plains" (Rivers 1906:47 ff.). In fact, these magnificent animals are semiwild, and it is actually dangerous for non-Todas to approach them too closely. To my knowledge, Toda is the only completely "buffalo-centered culture" (Emeneau 1938:209).

The bison and the wild pig (*cōle pandi* in the Mele Nāḍu dialect, *parādu pänḍi* in Ūrāḷi) figure frequently in accounts of hunting; they are killed with spears, or trapped and caught in pits and nets. Nowadays, though, the Irulas still hunt a variety of deer, antelope, and wild goats. I was assured that the best meat curry the Irulas know is that prepared from the flesh of the *kōa* (barking deer, *muntjak*, *Muntiacus muntjak*), sometimes called *kāṭṭāḍu* [literally, jungle goat], which is a loan word from Tamil. But they also relish the meat of the large sambar deer (*kaḍame*), which they are forbidden to hunt; the spotted deer (*puḷḷāyi* or *cemma*, Ūrāḷi *cāraṅgu*); the chevrotain or mouse-deer (*kūrve, pūgu*); the black buck (*pūkï*); and the Nilgiri *tahr*, or wild goat proper (*vereāḍu*).

Squirrels, rats, bandicoots, mice, and bats are a welcome addition to the Irula diet. My educated Irula informant P. Sivaraj denied that he would ever eat rats, but my Ūrāḷi informants classified rats and mice as edible (while they viewed the small house mouse as inedible and considered the bandicoot, which the Irulas call *ëggaṇa*, to be a delicacy). The large brown flying squirrel (Irula *vöḷilu, Petaurista philippensis*) is also killed and eaten with pleasure. As food, however, nothing compares with iguana, the large monitor lizard that the Irulas call *viruga* (*Varanus bengalensis*); its meat is considered the tastiest delicacy by all Irula tribes, and even my sophisticated friend P. Sivaraj licked his lips when describing iguana curry.

Crocodiles (*Crocodilus palustris*) also figure in Nilgiri folktales. This reptile, called *mocule* or *moculeye* in Irula, is always portrayed as an aggressive, treacherous enemy of man, albeit somewhat stupid. This is the

case in all Indian stories involving crocodiles. Crows, sparrows, parrots, cocks, and peacocks appear in Irula folklore as well. The parrot is a friendly bird and the sparrow, neat and decent; whereas the crow is dirty, lazy, and generally horrid. One Kota story tells why crows eat excrement, and another places the sparrow and the crow in contrast. Some motifs, the main tendency of the story, and even the plot outline are so similar to Irula stories (and to a Lingayat tale told by Frere in *Old Deccan Days* a century ago) that one must presume either a common source or a diffusion throughout South India.

In some ways, the most culturally interesting animal is the cobra. In the Irulas' opinion, as reflected in folklore, the cobra is most frequently friendly, harmless, even helpful; indeed, wise and mysterious. There are several beliefs shared by all Irulas; one is that cobras carry a precious gem that has magical properties; another, that the serpent is capable of acting as lover or husband to human females (and even eager to do so).

The motif of the snake-jewel is pan-Indian and ancient. The relatively old text *Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* (verse 4) mentions the "gem on the hoods of snakes." In Tamil literature, a few Sangam poems of the first through third centuries A.D. allude to snake-stones. Throughout the history of Tamil culture, the tradition of snake-jewels continues with persistence; thus it is mentioned in *Kantapurāṇam* (c. A.D. 1400), and the modern Tamil poet S. Bharati (d. 1921) speaks of "the fabled snake-gem in the cobra's hood" in his well-known poem "Chandramati."

According to Irula and Kuṟumba lore, the cobra has in its throat a magical blue crystal that it spits out during the night so as to illuminate its hunting ground. To possess this crystal is to have luck, success, power, and magical abilities. In the words of an authentic Irula narrator,

> a cobra leaves its ant hill in the very middle of the night and goes out and while grazing spits out its own stone and keeps it. As soon as we arrive at the place where the cobra came to graze and keeps the stone which it had disgorged, it will eat the stone again and go to its ant hill. We must come and take that stone. We may go and take that stone only when going at the time when that snake spits and keeps its stone. If the stone is taken the eyesight of that snake will go so that it won't see. We cannot take that stone with the hand. Then we come and bring cow-dung and if we throw it on the top of that stone the light of the stone will be subdued. Then the eyesight of the cobra will go so that it won't see. The stone is not available. Can that snake dance? Then we come, take the stone for ourselves and may return home.[7]

We may well ask whether there is a grain of truth in this persistent pan-Indian belief. While some herpetologists deny it (Deoras 1965:48), there are others who admit that the 'gems' disgorged by the snake may in fact be solidified remnants of food or some other (anorganic?) matter it had

devoured and later ejected. Such matter, 'polished' in the snake's digestive tract, may even have fluorescent properties.[8]

The motif of the snake as the lover of a woman appears in one of my Irula texts (see chapter 8). However, there are also vicious and dangerous snakes: *paccepāmbu* (*Lachesis gramineus*, green viper) and a water snake to whom humans are sacrificed. This motif occurs in an Ūrāḷi story. A hunter takes his seven children to a jungle shrine in which a water snake living in a pond is worshipped. He sacrifices his children, one by one, in return for wealth. The last child, however, is saved by an Ūrāḷi, Dēvanji of the Koḍuvä clan, who raises him; this child grows up to marry a Paṟaya girl.[9]

Among insects, the honeybee merits attention. Both *Apis indica* [forest bee] and *Apis dorsata* [rock bee] are very important in the life and lore of the Irulas. The gathering of honey has been a regular occupation of the indigenous people of the Nilgiris for thousands of years. Those tribes in whose economy it has played an important role have elaborate folklore about bees and about honey-gathering in general; honey and bees appear even in origin and ancestor myths.

The Irulas differentiate among four kinds of honey: *peruntēnu* [large honey], found in big, heavy honeycombs in the fissures of steep, rocky slopes (*vere*); *kōlantēnu* [pole honey], a very sweet honey produced by small bees and found on trees and bushes (cf. Badaga *kōla kunni* [small honeybee, dammar bee, *Melipona spp.*])[10]; *toḍudi*, honey from combs hidden in many layers in the hollows of old, dead trees and tree stumps; and *mucurutēnu*, a honey considered to be of the best quality, produced by *mucuru kunni*, a small bee with a long proboscis.

The Ūrāḷis have the following little tale about honey. There was a great famine for twelve years, and all Ūrāḷis were starving. The *mucuru*-honey said to the prickly pear, "We must do something to relieve the suffering of these hungry people. If you'll manage to feed them every six months, I'll take care of the next six months. Somehow we'll manage together to save them." The prickly pear agreed, demanding in return that the *mucuru*-honey would send its bees to collect its pollen. Then it flowered, and after developing fruit, it fed the hungry people for six months; the bees collected pollen and nectar and made honey, which fed the people for another six months. Thus, twelve years passed, the rains came, and prosperity returned.[11]

The Ūrāḷis have a proverb that says, *Mēle pāttanimu puṭṭu, pallike vagginamu puṭṭu* [When we look up, there's food, and when we bend down there's food]. My friend Rāyappan of Gundri glossed this as "The food which is found when bending down is the tuber (*kaṅgu*); and the food which one finds when looking up is honey (*tēnu*)." For the Todas, too, honey is of such importance that it is even mentioned in prayers. Emeneau quotes one such prayer that says, "May honey come!" along with "May water spring forth!" and "May fruit ripen!" (1974:16).

Both Irula and Kuṟumba lore mention insects that are connected with what seems to be a genuine layer of tribal religion and ritual. The Ālu Kuṟumbas speak of *úpuṭi kùnni*, a small, hairy, fast-flying, mysterious insect that is a servant of the god of death, Yama, and his messenger Citragupta.[12] The Irulas, meanwhile, speak of *dumbi*, a large black beetle. When a person is possessed, the *toga* [possessing deity] comes riding on the *dumbi* and, with a deep drone, enters the possessed person.

Toda prayers and curses, as given by Rivers (1906) and Emeneau (1974:16-19), well illustrate which animals fill the Todas with fear and

enmity. In the prayers, gods are beseeched to subdue jungle animals in general, and forest dogs, tigers, snakes, and elephants in particular. In the curses, a tiger is implored to seize a man, a boar to charge him, a leopard to carry him off, and a snake to bite him. In a penetrating study dating back to 1948, Emeneau discussed the problem of taboo on animal names, adding the Dravidian words for tiger. On the whole, however, the relationship of the Irulas and other tribal people to nature is different from that of Western man. In our Western vision of the world, nature is romantically worshipped on Sundays and holidays, and, according to D. T. Suzuki, it is otherwise regarded as "brutally factual, with no history objectively set before us," destined to be exploited "but finally swallowing us all in the purposelessness of the Unknown." We are divided from nature, and we attempt absolute control over it. In most of our Judaeo-Christian ideologies, Nature is against God, and Man and Nature are against each other. All three are almost constantly at war.

For the small tribes of the Irulas in the Nilgiris, nature consists of mountains and rivers; rocks and stones and earth; the sun, moon, and stars; the wind and the rain; grass, plants, and trees; birds and beasts; **and** man, who has remained an integral part. To treat nature as something irrational, inimical, and in opposition to human 'rationality' is a purely Western idea. The people of the jungle do not see man facing nature as he would an unfriendly stranger, but rather they see man thoroughly merged with nature, coming out of nature and going into nature — and yet, still conscious of himself as distinguishable. Of course, their 'vision' is not intellectually formulated in so many words, but the mode of their actions tells us that this is the intuition they have.

# Notes

[1] Cf. A. Arnoldus, "The Baiga Honey-Ceremony on the Occasion of the Flowering of Two Species of Strobilanthes" (Prepublication copy, 1979, Photocopy); K. M. Matthew, "The Flowering of Strobilanth," *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 67 (1971): 502-6; Breme Kamp, C. E. B., "Materials for a Monograph of the Strobilanthinae (Acanthaceae)," *Verhandelingen Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 11, no. 40 (1944): 1-306; A. Dharmalingam, "'Kurinji' the Wonder Plant," *The Hindu*, March 1, 1970; P. S. Swamy, *Caṅka ilakkiyattil ceṭikoṭi viḷakkam* (Description of plants in Sangam literature) (Madras, 1967), 26-41.

[2] Personal communication, Dieter B. Kapp. Cf. also Kapp 1982:373.

[3] Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas, on the other hand, claim to frighten bears away by singing a 'bear-song' to the tune of their drums. Cf. A. A. D. Luiz, *Tribes of Kerala* (New Delhi, 1962), 52-58; the text of such a song is given in L. A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala I* (Madras: Book Centre Publications,1968), 142. Cf. Kamil V. Zvelebil, *The Irula (Ërḷa) Language, Part II* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 88 ctn. 1.

[4] Literally, "flesh (*kaṛi*) of the vulva (*poṇḍi*)," lips of the vulva.

[5] Cf. Ālu Kuṛumba *bōka*, Pālu Kuṛumba *pōkkā̆nu* (D. B. Kapp), probably connected with Tamil *pākkaṉ*, Malayalam *pōkkān* [wild cat]. There are many alternative forms (*pōka, pōki, pūki*) in various Irula dialects.

[6] A Mele Nāḍu Irula story that I recorded at Kaḷampaḷḷa on March 17, 1978.

[7] Transcribed at Kōyikere in January 1968. Cf. Zvelebil, *The Irula (Ërḷa) Language, Part II*, pp. xi-xii for the Irula text.

[8] Personal communication by Dr. F. Kornalík, a well-known Czech herpetologist.

[9] Recorded on March 2, 1978, at Gundri.

[10] Recorded on March 2, 1978, at Gundri.

[11] Personal communication, Paul Hockings.

[12] Personal communication, D. B. Kapp. Cf. also his recent, detailed paper, "Honigsammeln und Jagen bei den Alu-Kurumbas," *Anthropos* 78 (1983): 715-38.

# 4

## Irulas and the Others

Between 1968 and 1978, I gave a great deal of thought to the question of **who** comprised the Irulas. When I began my research, "the Irulas" was a vague term applied to a people living in the lower jungles of the Nilgiris, in particular on their eastern and southeastern slopes, and speaking 'a mixture' of Kannaḍa and Tamil, or a form of 'corrupt Tamil.' There was a hazy notion that the very small and rather poor primitive community of the Kasabas was somehow related to the Irulas. Of the Ūrāḷis beyond Satyamangalam, no one really knew anything, or if they did, they did not say. Of the relationships among the Irulas, Shōlegas, Muḍugas, and various groups of Kuṟumba-speaking people, no one knew anything at all.

It soon became obvious to me that the Irulas of the Nilgiris proper are two communities speaking one language that differed from both Tamil and Kannaḍa, though it does resemble both; in fact, the language differs from any other known South Dravidian tongue, though obviously it is reminiscent of some archaic form of Tamil. I also realized that there were probably some important differences in the speech of these two communities: e.g., when pointing to the very typical bamboo flute that they love to play, the members of one Irula community would say *koálu* or *kwälü*, while the members of the other Irula group would say *kogálu*. I began to work on these linguistic differences systematically and found that they are matched by social and cultural distinctions.

Finally, it became obvious that Nilgiri Irulas, a tribe forming an endogamous community, consider themselves as one people, though they live in two moieties among which intermarriage is possible. These two groups are the Mele Nāḍu, or 'Upper Country,' Irulas (also termed Maladeśa or Male Ūrāyi) and the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu, or 'Outer Forests,' Irulas. The Mele Nāḍus live on the northeastern, eastern, and southeastern slopes of the hills, with a few areas of (relatively) dense concentration. These settlements are between Tengumarahada and the Bhavanisagar Water

Reservoir on the southern banks of the river Moyar (such old Irula settlements as Allimāṟu-Hallimoyar and Kaḷampaḷḷa-Kallampalaiyam), on the slopes and in the vicinity of the holy Rangaswami Mountain (e.g., Garkiyur, Aracode, and Kokkode), and along the Kotagiri-Mettupalaiyam road (Kunjapanai and Kolikkarai among them).

The Vĕṭṭe Kāḍus, meanwhile, live on the periphery of the southern and southwestern slopes of the Nilgiris, with the center of density in the jungle valleys of the Tamilnadu-Kerala borderland, particularly in the Attappadi Valley. One finds, however, Vĕṭṭe Kāḍu women married into Mele Nāḍu Irula settlements, and some Vĕṭṭe Kāḍu families living alongside Mele Nāḍu units in multiethnic villages such as Barliar.

As stressed above, the two groups form the core of the Irula tribal complex. They are the Nilgiri Irulas proper, and the two dialects that they speak may be summarily termed South Irula, in obvious contrast to North Irula. (For these dialectical differences within the Irula language, cf. Zvelebil 1979c:17-21). Who, then, speaks North Irula?

We are on less firm ground here. I do maintain, in disagreement with some Indian scholars,[1] that the 'mini-tribe' (estimated at about 450 to 800) of the Kasabas (Kasavas, Kasuvas) living in a few hamlets on the lower northern slopes of the hills, and with whom I worked mostly in 1968, belongs linguistically to the Irula Tribal Complex, despite considerable anthropological and cultural differences. However, intermarriage, though rare, is possible among Kasabas and Irulas proper. On the whole, though their speech is further distant from Mele Nāḍu and Vĕṭṭe Kāḍu dialects than these two southern speech-forms are from one another, I am convinced that Kasaba, too, is an Irula dialect with a number of Kannaḍa-like features and many Kannaḍa loanwords.[2] Thus, the following diagram may be used to describe the Nilgiri Irulas:

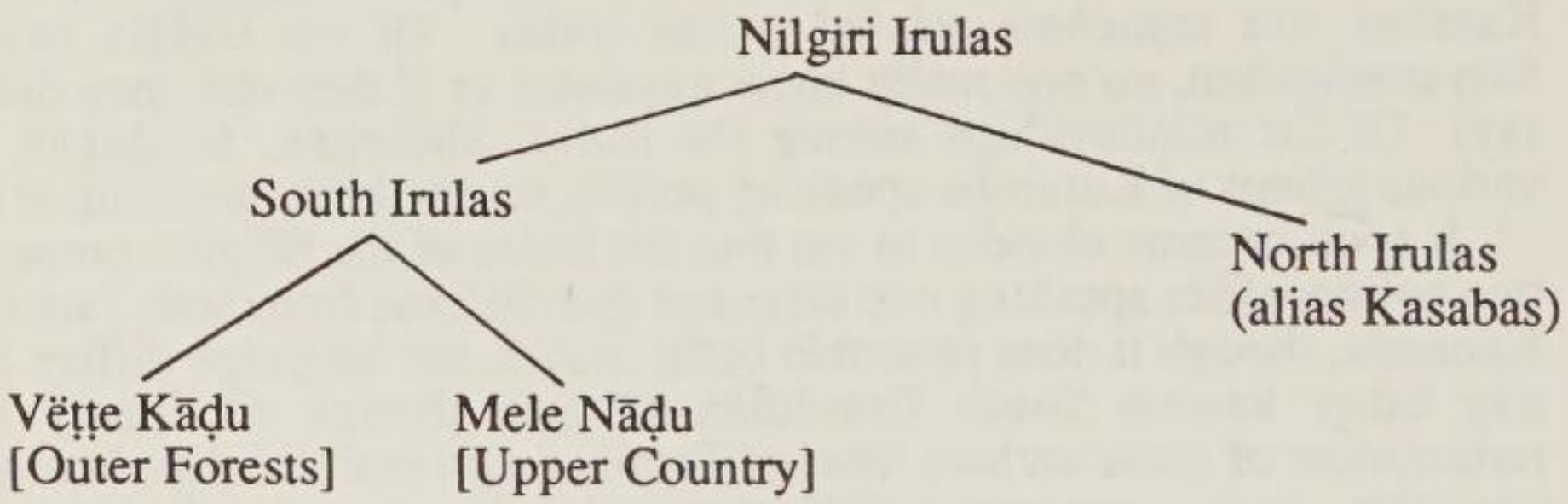



Fig. 9: Linguistic relationships among Nilgiri Irulas

Although the last published census (1971) estimated the total number of speakers of Nilgiri Irula at 5,800, I am convinced that the number is considerably higher, not so much due to an increase in Irula population as to an incorrect estimate in the 1971 census. My estimate of all Irula speakers, including the Kasabas and the Irula-speaking Ūrāḷis, would be about 12,500, though my friend P. Sivaraj, a 'genuine' Irula, who took part in the 1981 census work, thinks rather in terms of 15,000 souls.[3]

Fig. 10: A Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irula girl from Barliar (1976)

I briefly described my search for the Ūrāḷis earlier in this book. It is now beyond any doubt that the Ūrāḷis who live in the northernmost areas of the Coimbatore District belong linguistically, culturally, and anthropologically to the Irula Tribal Complex. There is, however, no intermarriage between them and the Nilgiri Irulas, although alternatively they call themselves Irulas and resent being classified as Shōlegas. Nevertheless, they form a sort of transition between two tribal blocks: the Irula 'nation' and the Shōlega 'nation.' The situation may be indicated by the following diagram:

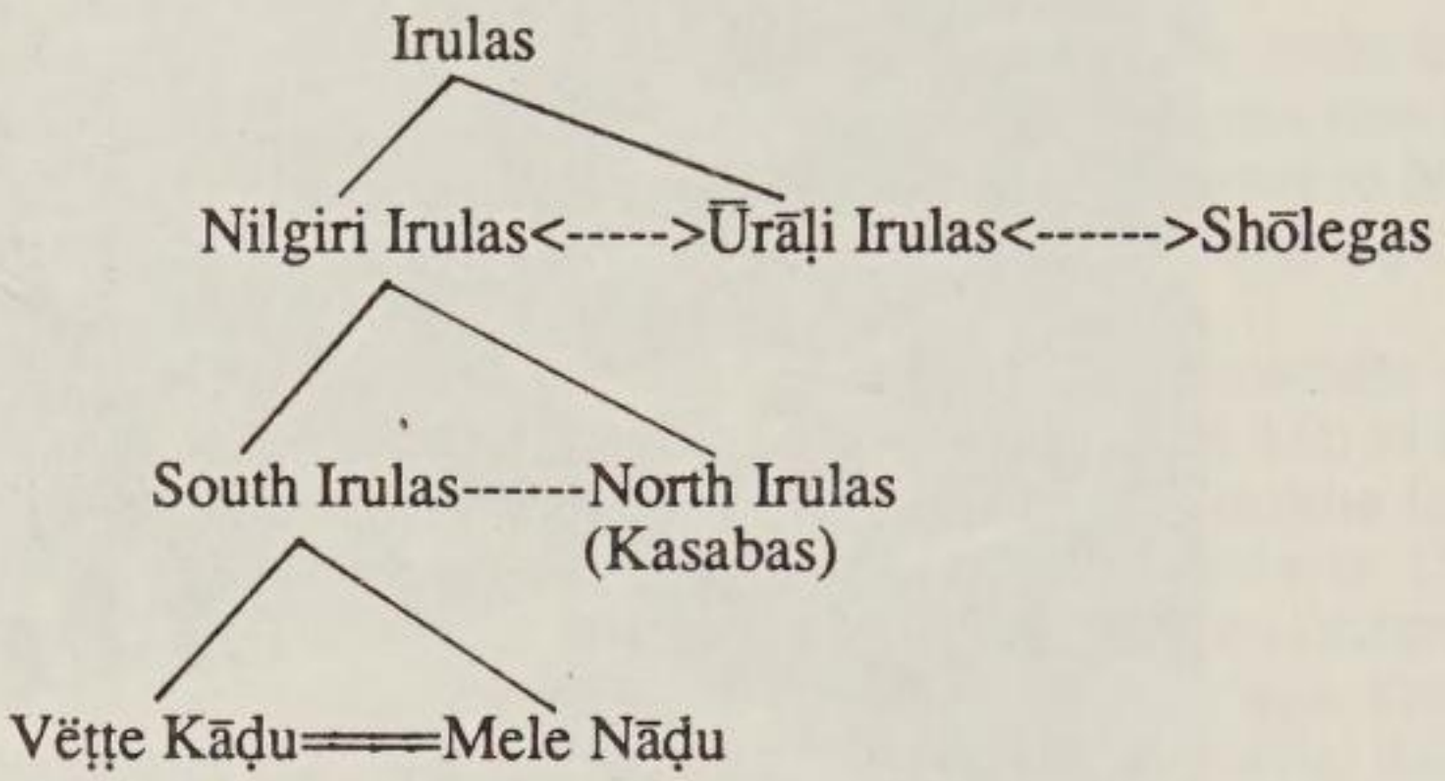



Fig. 11: The Irula tribal complex

The symbol ==== indicates regular (though not frequent) intermarriage. I do consider Vëṭṭe Kāḍus and Mele Nāḍus as one tribe. The symbol ----- indicates possible but exceptional intermarriage. The symbol <---> indicates cultural and anthropological ties and linguistic affinity.

The most intriguing relationship is that between the Ūrāḷis and the Shōlegas. Whereas I have no doubt that Vëṭṭe Kāḍus and Mele Nāḍus are one and the same tribe, and that the Kasabas speak a somewhat divergent and Kannaḍized Irula dialect, I cannot say anything certain about how the Ūrāḷis (and, 'through' them, all other Irulas) are related to the Shōlegas. The link is certainly not linguistic; if Irula (i.e., all its four dialects) is a Tamiloid tribal speech, the language of the Shōlegas[4] is clearly so Kannaḍa-like that one or two investigators are inclined to regard it as a Kannaḍa dialect. But the origin myths and various legends of the Irulas (particularly the Ūrāḷis) and the Shōlegas undoubtedly point to some very deep, very ancient close connection between the tribes; whether the connection is genetic or areal remains to be seen. There are several mythemes common to all these people, and only to them, and they are of crucial importance: one is the motif of a meat-eating deity of a tribe (in contrast to a vegetarian deity representing a vegetarian community), the meat-eating versus the vegetarian being quite an issue; another is the motif of a tribal ancestor-hero killing the demon Savaṇan, who (along with Kārayya, Billayya, and the god Mahādeśvara) appears in the folklore of all of these communities.

There are at least five native speculations on the name of the Irula people. Its indigenous form is *ëṛla/ëṛḷa* for the male of the tribe, *ëṛlci/ëṛḷci* for the female, and *ëṛlaru/ëṛḷaru* for the plural, the Irulas. There are

variants: one of my Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irula texts has *orula*, and Diffloth quotes *ïṛuḷa*. The Tamil form is *iruḷaṉ*, and Tamil folk etymology connects this name with the word for handsome, *iruḷ* [darkness, dark color]. Thus, the Irulas would presumably either refer to people of (strikingly?) dark complexion or perhaps to people living in dark jungles. This, indeed, was accepted by earlier Western travelers and ethnographers as the explanation of the name; and I admit that when, decades ago, I first read the name "Irula" and what it was supposed to mean, I envisioned a dark-skinned native savage crawling through a dense, dark jungle.

The Irulas are dark-skinned, but their complexion is certainly not darker than that of some other related tribes (e.g., Kuṛumbas, Shōlegas, and Paṇiyans); on the contrary, Irulas are often fairer than dark Tamil Harijans. Also, the forests where they live are not particularly dark. Thus, we should probably search for a different derivation. The one etymology that suggests itself most easily is the one given for the first time by Diffloth (1968): a connection with Tamil *iṛavuḷar* [hill tribes], Malayalam *iṛavan, iṛavāḷar* [hill tribe of basket-makers], and Kannaḍa *eṛava* [a hill tribe in Coorg]. (See Zvelebil 1979c:14-15 for a detailed discussion of the etymology.)

However, the Irulas themselves explain their name as follows: a man and a woman had a son who was born in the dark of night (*iruḷ*); thus, *iruḷili*. A soothsayer told the parents that, since the boy was born in a dark, inauspicious hour, he should be abandoned. So, on that same dark night, they took the child to a dark forest and left him there. Somehow the boy survived, was reared by wild animals in the jungle, found himself a woman, and became the forefather of the Irulas. Because he was born and abandoned in the dark of night, he called himself Iruḷan.

In addition, all important events in the life of the Irulas take place in the night, when it is dark. The tribal council (*nāya*) meets after sunset; dancing and singing (*āṭṭapāṭṭa*) during festivals takes place only at night; in the old days, even marriages and funerals took place at night. This was because otherwise the Irulas would be disturbed by other people. Hence, their name, 'people of darkness.' Also, since the Irulas developed from a pair of wild jungle-cats (*bōka*) — night animals, prowling around in darkness — they are so named.

Another point about the name is that it is connected with the verb *ēṛigadu* [to throw, throw away, discharge]. The Irulas are a poor, abandoned, lowly people, living on things that others have thrown away or handed down to them; hence their name, *ëṛlaru*. Finally, when Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā (cf. the ancient Indian epic, *Rāmāyaṇa*) went into exile, they had to pass through twelve forests. They took along the Irulas, not yet so called, to provide music and dance and to entertain them. But no sooner did the travelers reach the second (*iraṇḍāvadu/reṇḍāvadu*) of the forests than the lazy Irulas fell asleep. They remained there, forgetting all about their masters and their duty, hence their name.

It was only during my 1981 field trip that I could finally obtain some coherent picture about the Irula indigenous traditions concerning their early history. When introducing the topic, it is necessary to explain a few crucial terms the Irulas use in this connection. They distinguish, for example, among *paḷakka-vaḷakka* or current (past and present) customs; *sampradāya* or tradition, particularly sacred and mythic lore; and *pūrviga* or ancient 'history.' Thus, e.g., should an Irula hear the woodpecker (*cigina*) in the forest, he knows that if its sound comes from the left, everything is all right; while if it comes from the right, it means bad news, usually death. This is an instance of *paḷakka-vaḷakka*. The origin, creation, and ancestor myths,

and the worship of the gods, belong to the sphere of *sampradāya*. Of *pūrviga* I am going to speak now.

According to the reports of some ancient people (*cila beliyavar cöllugadu*), the Irulas once lived in the plains and hills east of the Nilgiris. During these times, they were led by a heroic Irula chief named Kōyä. They were an Irula nation, a confederation of tribes, until Kōyä died. Then the tribes became disunited and disorganized, particularly under the impact of the invasions from Mysore. The Irulas thus had to move away from their ancestral country, the center of which had been Kōyä's town, Kōyamuttūru [Coimbatore].[5] Thus, one tribe went 'up' into the Nilgiris (*mēleke*, hence Mele Nāḍu Irulas), where they had to subsist on tubers (*kaṅgu*) and honey (*tēnu*). Another tribe went to the 'outer forests' (*vëṭṭe kāḍuku*), particularly to the Attappadi Valley; these were the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas. A third tribe went to the jungles (*cōleke*) and became known as the Shōlegas, while a fourth tribe was in a state of total confusion (*kacambu*), finally settling down as the Kasabas.

The most concise description of the Irula social organization is an endogamous tribe with exogamous clans and lineages based on patrilocal, patrilineal, and patronymic structure. The organization into clans (*kula*) is in the process of disintegration. There is consensus among various informants only on one point: that 'originally,' there were twelve Irula clans, some of which seem now to be extinct. Reconstructed, these clans[6] are as follows:

Kuppe, pl. Kupparu
Cambe, pl. Cambaru
Dēvane, pl. Dēvanaru
Kallukaṭṭi, pl. Kallukaṭṭiyaru
Koḍuve, pl. Koḍuvaru
Pūṅge, pl. Pūṅgaru
Kuṟunage, pl. Kuṟunagaru
Pērade, pl. Pēradaru
Vëḷḷage, pl. Vëḷḷagaru
Koppaḷige, pl. Koppaḷigaru
Uppaḷige, pl. Uppaḷigaru
Pērige, pl. Pērigaru

The first eight clans are still functioning in different Irula settlements, while the last four may be extinct. Clans are important in marriage arrangements (defining the exogamy) but also in other matters. A wife becomes, by marriage, a member of her husband's clan for the purpose of burial but not for the purpose of possible remarriage if widowed or divorced. Both male and female children share the clan of their father.

In Irula society, the tribe is homogenous, and an Irula is *homo equalis* with no distance in questions of eating, sexual relationships, and so on. The Irulas live in a localized area, with a culture based on oral tradition, and the core of their religion is 'tribal' and *sui generis*. Most of these characteristics are in direct and striking contrast to Hindu society. The Hindus are not organized in exogamous clans, but rather in endogamous castes and subcastes; their society is based on the hierarchy of high and low status, a feature that is totally absent among the Irulas. There is considerable distance in eating, sexual contacts, and so on. Hindu society, typically, is heterogenous, with Hindus living in large areas, and having a

culture based on written scriptures and a religion based on Sanskritic gods and Āgamic ritual.

This does not mean that the Irulas live in communities of total equality or that their society has preserved a sort of 'primitive communism' (if there ever had been such a thing among them). There is, of course, the notion of prestige and importance of certain individuals, based on property and on social functions in the village. Hinduization has influenced Irula communities not only in matters of religion and verbal culture but also in social matters. However, compared to the Hindu plainspeople surrounding them, the Irulas have preserved a relatively simple, democratic, horizontally unstratified social structure.[7]

Among the Irulas, "men are the creators and women are the producers. Men conceive and originate; women listen and follow" (Gardner and Heider 1968:25). Though industry is evident in both men and women (even if the Irulas are not overindustrious and like spending a great deal of time in leisure and play), men preempt all the drama and excitement, while women generally live lives of drudgery. Men hunt, collect honey, tell stories, sing, dance, play musical instruments, become possessed, and take a more active part in religious life. Men also go to the market, descend to Mettupalaiyam or Satyamangalam, or go up to the Kotagiri and Ooty (Ootacamund) bazaars; I have never seen an Irula woman in any of the market-towns (though one may daily meet Toda women who have accompanied their men there). Among all forms of entertainment, women occasionally take part in dancing — and when they do, they dance vigorously — and in singing and story-telling, the latter an exceptional talent. Their main entertainment is gossip; they have a really good time only when staying with other women in the menstruation hut. Another favorite occupation among Irula women is delousing. They are not, however, depressed or dejected; on the contrary, they are certainly more vigorous, independent, enterprising, and gay than Hindu women from the surrounding plains.

The in-group sentiment of the Nilgiri communities is still strong. The Irulas, too, distinguish strictly between their own tribe, the *ëṛla vamca*[8] living in the *ëṛla cīme* and speaking the *ëṛla nāya*, and the non-Irulas, called simply *vēṛe āḷu* [other people] or *anniya* [strangers]. Among the latter, the most primitive may be the Cholakkar or Cholanaickans, popularly known as the 'cave-men of Kerala,' since they live in the caves of the Nilambur basin.[9] However, the Nilgiri Irulas do not come into contact with these other tribes of Nilambur and Wynaad. The communities, tribal or demitribal, who are in contact with the Nilgiri Irulas are — apart from the Badagas, who can hardly be regarded as tribals and who are nowadays absolutely ubiquitous in the hills — the Muḍugas, the Ālu and Pālu Kuṛumbas, and, more rarely, the Todas and Kotas. The Northern Irulas (i.e., Kasabas) live in the proximity of the Shōlegas, various Kuṛumba-speaking tribes (Jēnu, Bëṭṭa, and Muḷḷu Kuṛumbas), Paṇiyans, Wynaad Chettis, and Mauntadan Chettis. The Irula Ūrāḷis have a close, but not always friendly, association with the Shōlegas.

As far as Nilgiri Irulas proper are concerned, the most interesting and dramatic relationship is their connection to the Muḍugas and the Kuṛumbas. The Muḍugas are a small tribe[10] closely related to the Irulas, at least linguistically. Not much is known about them, although D. B. Kapp of Heidelberg recently performed the first genuinely scientific fieldwork on them. The Irulas believe that the Muḍugas can change into evil monkeys or blood-sucking lizards, and that they can cause people's death. They are

also accused of stealing fowl, goats, and buffaloes, and they figure in Irula stories in this light. Irula villages appoint a Kuṟumba called a *modali* to protect them from Muḍugas. Because the *modali* is even more powerful and dangerous than the Muḍugas, they will be afraid of him and stay away from the village. Thus, the three villages of Kunjapanai, Kolikarai, and Sundapatti, which are relatively close to each other, employ one Kuṟumba *modali*.[11]

In point of fact, the Pālu Kuṟumbas are the community with which the Nilgiri Irulas do maintain regular and intimate contact, save for the Badagas, who are ever-present and omnipresent. In the *ëṟlacīme*, there live two Kuṟumba tribes: about 1,000 Ālu Kuṟumbas and about 800 Pālu Kuṟumbas.[12] My two excursions into Kuṟumba territory are due to my younger colleague D. B. Kapp and to Dr. S. Narasimhan, the near-legendary physician and benefactor of the tribals. During the 1976 field trip, Kapp took me to a tiny Kuṟumba settlement in one of the southwestern valleys of the mountains, a place of rugged, wild beauty; thus I met the Kuṟumbas, and a charming old Muḍuga woman, in their natural habitat. Dr. Narasimhan was kind enough to let me accompany him, on February 7, 1978, on his visit to the field hospital at Arayure, an old Kuṟumba settlement in a very difficult territory with steep slopes, deep ravines, and thick jungle. Seven of us accompanied Dr. Narasimhan as he traveled down through dense, dark jungle, along a road that our jeep could hardly manage, amidst awe-provoking rocks. We reached Arayure late at night.[13]

There is practically no interaction between the Irulas and the Kotas, who number about 1,300. Because of this, and in spite of the fact that during my last two field trips I stayed for quite a few months at Kotagiri, I have almost no Kota connections. Hence I abstain from writing here about the Kotas, since nearly all I would say would be derived information. The best contributions on the tribe are Emeneau's *Kota Texts* (1944-46) and Mandelbaum's papers, cited in Hockings (1972:441-62).

There is some occasional communication among Irulas and Todas, but this relationship must be rooted in ancient tradition. Thanks to my friendship with Evam Piljean-Wiedemann, and to the Irulas' great admiration and affection for the Todas, my cognizance of Toda affairs is personal and close. I mention here, though, only a few striking features of their culture that I personally witnessed or that have some connection with the Irulas.

The Toda tribe, estimated at 1,200 souls in 1977, is divided into two non-intermarrying moieties, one ranked higher than the other, each divided into several exogamous, patrilineal clans. In addition, each moiety is divided into exogamous matrilineal clans; each Toda thus belongs to a patrilineal clan and to a matrilineal clan, and must avoid marriage with two different sets of kin. But, as Emeneau says, "this is by no means the end." The family is prevailingly polyandrous, several brothers sharing a common wife. In addition, divorce and regularized wife-stealing are common. Alongside of marriage within the moiety, there are also socially approved and regularized arrangements between individuals of the two moieties; each man has a regular sexual partner in the moiety that is not his own, and so has each woman.

In addition, there are also more casual love affairs. Emeneau is obviously right when he writes of the Todas that, "as a tribe, they are vigorously and adventurously sexual" (1941:173). To make the situation even more complex (and, from a Western point of view, even more

dramatic), a woman practices sexual intercourse not only in marriage with her husband(s) and with her lover of the other moiety, but also with the dairy priests on various occasions and at funerals ("in what is as near promiscuity as anything can be," says Emeneau). There are also casual encounters with men who are attracted by, and attractive to, her. Thus, among the Todas, biological paternity is nearly impossible to determine.[14] I was told, by a Toda informant, that shortly before attaining puberty, Toda girls are deflowered and sexually initiated by a man of another clan.

A casual observer might expect a Toda woman to be a picture of depravity and a Toda man to be a physical and moral ruin. However, this is emphatically not the case, and that it is not so only proves that sexual mores are a very relative matter of social convention. S. Shaktivel maintains that there is no word for adultery among the Todas and that the concept itself is totally alien to the language and to the culture (1972:56). W. H. Rivers writes that "immorality attaches [not to the adulterer but] rather to the man who grudges his wife to another" (1906:530).

Toda women are, as a rule, well-behaved, modest, diligent, possessed of keen artistic sense, energetic, gay, and full of *joie de vivre*. They are also good wives and mothers. As to the men, one can hardly find among Indian tribals — not to mention Hindus from the plains — more handsome, strong, tough, or healthy men than the Todas. *Voilà!* a problem for the geneticists. There are, naturally, a few exceptions.

Toda culture, on the whole, is a closed culture, nearly inaccessible to conscious choice or change. It has thus proved difficult for the Todas to acculturate or to admit any but the most trivial change. The efforts of the present Tamil administration notwithstanding, it is nearly impossible to persuade them to leave their buffaloes and to become potato growers. How often I have heard complaints from the Todas: during the British regime, they were at least left alone, apart from the abortive attempt to convert them to Anglican Christianity.

Thus, Toda culture is highly specialized, aberrant, and very elaborate in the most minute details. Toda culture patterns are very "peculiarly and rigidly structured" (Emeneau 1965:273). The Toda creative urge variously finds expression in splendid embroidery done by the tribe's women,[15] and in ornamentation applied to wooden items such as clubs, poles, and walking sticks. Toda oral poetry and mythology are likewise unique, and to witness dancing among them is an unforgettable experience. Only the men dance, forming a circle facing inward at its center. Each man joins his hand to that of his neighbor so that, with elbows close to the side and forearms at right angles to upper arm, the palms of the two men's hands are placed together, and the fingers are interlaced without being bent. The circle rotates in a counterclockwise direction with a measured step. The right foot of each man at each step is placed behind the left foot of his neighbor on the right, and then the left foot is brought across, to the front of the neighbor's right foot. Most of the dancing is done to the accompaniment of a collective shout, in deep, bellowing voices, marking the time for each step: *o háw-hów, o háw-hów*! It sounds complicated, but it is not; in 1968, thanks to Evam (Īfam) and her friends, I took part in such a dance at a ceremony marking the setting up of a new temple. Clinging to my new Toda friends, I found the dance marvelously enjoyable. My collection of detailed color slides of this dancing, and of the entire ceremony, I count among my most treasured documentary material.

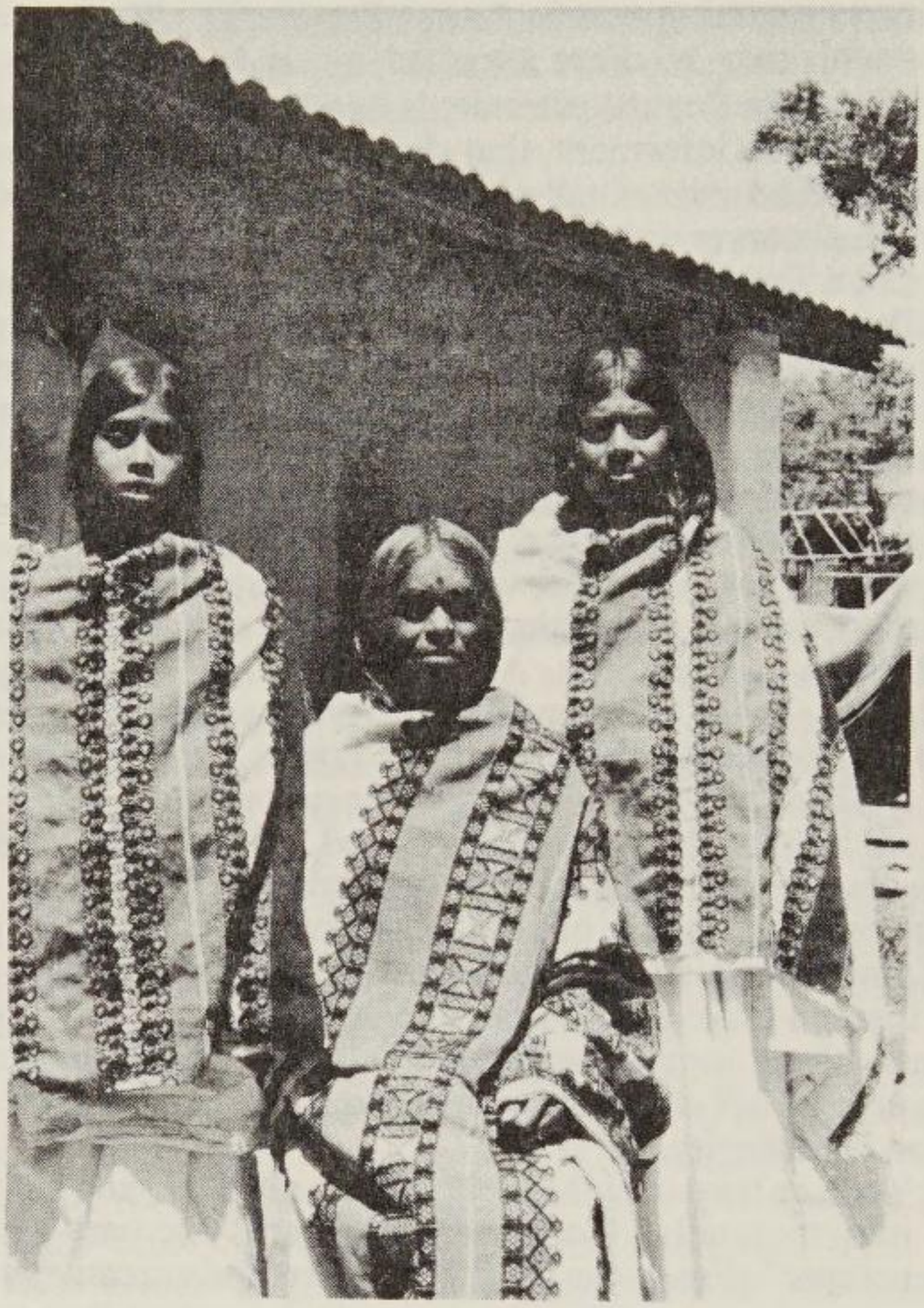


Fig. 12: Toda women, Kodanadu (1978)

Fig. 13: Toda man, Ootacamund (1968)

Todas frequently compose songs while the dance goes on. In contrast, there is not much imaginative story-telling, so important to the Irulas. Emeneau describes in detail the technique and procedure of song composition (1937a, 1958, 1965, 1966). The song units are shouted in a peculiar throaty bark, "which distorts the consonants and the vowels and makes the words quite unintelligible to anyone but a Toda," first by the composer, then by the whole dancing circle. Emeneau has more recently dedicated a magnificent monograph to Toda oral poetry.[16]

The Todas live in an area about twenty miles long and ten miles wide, hence, in a relatively small area. Since they are continuously on the move, visiting friends and market places, carrying on their affairs over the whole area, songs become known throughout the territory within three or four days of composition. Reports of death, childbirth, quarrels, struggles, and love affairs spread very quickly. Compared to such constant and overall mobility, the Irulas seem very much hidden, sedentary, and slow.

Toda settlements are called, like their patrilineal clans, *moḏ* (Anglicized via Badaga to mund, cf. Ootacamund). They consist of a few houses, a dairy-temple, and a buffalo pen. Munds are usually picturesquely situated. The houses look like half-barrels; the entrance is closed with a solid slab or plank of wood, and there are no openings or outlets of any kind. On the inside, Toda houses are dark, warm, cozy, and stuffy, permeated by the very particular Toda odor described earlier. They are neat in appearance, of bamboo construction fastened with rattan and covered with thatch, which renders them watertight. Inside the house, on the right side, is a raised platform used as a sleeping place. On the left side of the fireplace is a slight elevation where cooking utensils, rice-pounders, and so on are kept. The house proper is usually surrounded by an enclosure, and the buffalo pen is situated near the mund.

The Toda language! I have already mentioned its complexity, but I must turn to it again. We would be amused by an opinion expressed in 1873 about the Todas and their remarkable language were its author not G. U. Pope, the famous Tamil scholar at Oxford University. He wrote that the "Tuda language has no compositions, written or unwritten, not a ballad nor a scrap of anything to indicate intellectual activity" — though Emeneau has collected and published 245 Toda songs! The songs are, structurally, highly sophisticated, and many of them are beautiful poetry. Pope goes on to say that

> The Tudas, like their buffaloes, are fine animals; but they are least cultivated of the Dravidian races....[They] chiefly converse in the open air, calling to each other from one breezy hill-top to another. Their speech sounds like Old Kanarese spoken in the teeth of a gale of wind...[their] language has thus dwindled to a mere skeleton. It now barely suffices for the purposes of a very barbarous people. (Ibid., 240)

In studying the Todas, I was understandably interested in the expressions designating specific Toda cultural items, animals typical of the Nilgiris, and words connected with Toda religion and mythology (and their possible connection or relationship with Irula forms). I learned that *kwēɬ* is

the clarinet or oboe made by the Kotas and used by all Nilgiri tribes; the Irulas designate it, variously, *koálu, kwälü, kugálu. Puxury* is the bamboo flute (cf. Irula *buguri, bugiriya*).[17] The splendidly embroidered Toda garments are called *pūtxuɻy* (*puthkuli* in popular literature), and the extra large pockets in a *pūtxuɻy* are called *kwīṣ*. I abstain from quoting further linguistic details; the interested reader may find them in the Toda glossary in Appendix B.

I must, however, mention the fact that for all geographical terms, the Todas have their own place-names and designations. Thus, for example, Pojōrm is their name for Ootacamund, the capital of the Nilgiri District. Toda mythology is alive, permeating Toda culture, applied to all corners of the hills. Thanks to my Toda friends, Īfam, Mutxēn, Piɻyxēn, and Nāṣyxēn, I could observe a Toda *nōym* [tribal council]; watch the construction of new dairy temples and the rites performed by the priest, clad in a black *pōštüṇy;*[18] and hear the priest muttering the sacred words that introduce all prayers, *keṣem pešem tōkiṣy Ðišky*. This sacred formula brings me to the goddess, Tōkiṣy, creator of most of the Toda social and religious institutions: the clans, the buffaloes that belong to the clans, the clans' sacred names, the dairies. The hero Kwaɻēn also performed some acts of creation, though he is a distinctly minor figure in this context. Finally, there is the *petöw* or 'great god' Ōn, also called Intöw, the lord of Amunōɻ [the world of the dead]. Thus, the triad Tōkiṣy, Ōn, and Kwaɻēn are probably the most important, most colorful figures in Toda mythology.

One day, in 1968, my Toda companions fed me large millet-balls heavily sweetened with brown sugar and soaked in buffalo ghee; they then proceeded to tell me the story of Koɽaɻöw, son of Tōkiṣy. His birth was somewhat odd; one day, when Tōkiṣy was traveling from one mund to another, she entered a cave and gave birth to a son. The placenta dropped into a stream and was carried down to the river Töwfāw (Paikāra). Traveling down the river, it became tangled in two plants, *tīb* and *paɽc*. The afterbirth then slowly arose and became a boy, Koɽaɻöw. The child lived in the river until he was eight years old, the river being Tōkiṣy's brother. As the boy sat in the lap of his uncle the river, he played at making toy buffalo horns with the *tīb* plant. When he was eight, he founded a *tī* [sacred dairy] and created a male and a female buffalo out of earth. He also built a buffalo pen and made the black priestly garment, the *tüṇi*. Later, he fetched a churning stick from a place near Makurti Peak and made milking vessels, the bell used in the dairy temple, and all other sacred things; he also became dairy priest of the buffaloes. Later, however, he appointed another man as dairy priest and another as his assistant, and he handed over the charge of the *tī* to them. He then went away to the hill Koɽaɻöw, where he lived in an iron cave, bathing in a pool near the hill. At that time, he was not yet recognized as a *töw* [deity], and when the gods held council, they did not invite him; this made him very angry.

Near Koɽaɻöw Mountain, there was a wood in which a huge tree (*Michelia nilagirica*) grew. Koɽaɻöw ordered that honeybees should come to the tree, and after a while, some 300 honeycombs hung on the tree, which bent down under their weight. One day, about 20 men came to collect honey; they were Todas, Irulas, and Kuɽumbas together. The Todas made a fire under the tree, while the Irulas and Kuɽumbas climbed the tree and collected honey from the hives. When they had collected the honey from all but three or four nests, the tree became so light that it sprang back, killing the Irulas and Kuɽumbas. The Todas then returned home.

At that time, Koṛaṭöw was unmarried. He went about carrying an iron stick. One day, a Kuṛumba woman came to the tree in search of honey. Koṛaṭöw knocked her on the head with his iron stick; she became pregnant at once, giving birth to a daughter that very evening. The child was very beautiful, so Koṛaṭöw decided to marry her and immediately sent the child's mother away.

Soon after the death of the Irulas and Kuṛumbas at the tree, a sambar calf came to Koṛaṭöw. He caught it, tamed it, and kept it for a month. Then certain of the Todas came to Koṛaṭöw and asked him for a place to live. He settled them in a place he called Kȫṛȫṛ. When they asked for buffaloes, he gave them the sambar deer and said it would become buffaloes for them. This was the origin of the Kȫṛȫṛ mund and its buffaloes, the only Toda buffaloes "made from the sambar deer." After all this had happened, the gods recognized Koṛaṭöw as a *töw*, a god. He was admitted among them and now lives on Mt. Koṛaṭöw; but he still sits, at times, in the lap of the river Töwfāw. He is the main protective deity of the Kȫṛȫṛ and Kȫṛ clans, and the chief munds of these clans are situated near his hill.

When one is among the Todas, one feels somehow that one has entered a mythic world. The Todas look like a race of ancient heroes — almost giants of a different, earlier age — with their strikingly large hands and feet, their big, handsome faces, and their warm, rich, reddish-brown complexions; clad in long, unique cloaks; and walking in long strides with sticks in hand and bodies slightly bent forward. Indeed, the millet-sugar-ghee concoction my Toda friends gave me proved disastrous to the Western stomach. Theirs is not food that mere mortals of the twentieth century can easily digest.

# Notes

[1] S. V. Shanmugam, who reviewed my first monograph, *The Irula Language* (Wiesbaden, 1973) in the *Journal of Tamil Studies* 5 (1974): 78-79, refutes my conclusion that Kasaba is a Northern dialect of Irula. The one best-informed expert on Kasaba, V. Chidambaranatha Pillai, does not take a decisive stand and thinks that "a detailed study alone will not help us to arrive at the right conclusion."

[2] Kasaba is described well in V. Chidambaranatha Pillai's *Phonology of Kasaba with Vocabulary* (1976) and *A Grammar of the Kasaba Language* (1978), both published by Annamalai University.

[3] The 1961 census gave 4,617 Irulas in the Nilgiri District, in 33 small settlements; this figure does not include the Kasabas and Ūrāḷis.

[4] The Shōlegas' language is, as yet, practically undescribed. A very small number of inadequate papers have appeared. In 1978, I succeeded in working — under very adverse conditions — with a Shōlega informant in a very intensive situation, and I gathered some important, though fragmentary, data.

[5] Aiyappan (1948:102) mentions the tradition of an Irula chieftain whose name became the name of the town of Coimbatore. See also Zvelebil 1979c:4.

[6] My chief Irula informant, P. Sivaraj, belongs to the Kupparu clan. A more detailed discussion of the clans may be found in Zvelebil 1979c:73-79. The first eight clans are vigorously alive in Mele Nāḍu and Vĕṭṭe Kāḍu communities, i.e., among the Nilgiri Irulas proper, although ritual formulas and other cultural expressions always mention 'seven clans' (*ōḷu kula*). The Kasabas have different clans on which no updated information is available. For a more detailed description of the Ūrāḷi and Kasaba clans, and an updated description of Irula clan organization, see the first part of chapter four in Zvelebil 1982.

[7] The village organizations, organs of social control, lineages, and kinship will be dealt with briefly in chapter five.

[8] It is somewhat ironic that this and the following terms are derived ultimately from Sanskrit; indeed, there is no community in India that completely escaped the process of 'Sanskritization,' as Emeneau recognized years ago. Thus, *vamca* (pronounced [vamsa]), is ultimately borrowed from Skt. *vaṃśa*. Irula and Ālu Kuṟumba *cīme* (cf. Tamil *cīmai*), Toda *sīmy*, Badaga *sīme* is ultimately Skt. *sīmā-*, Pali *sīmā-*, Prakrit *sīmā-*

[boundary, field]. Irula *nāya* (cf. Toda *nōym* [dispute, tribal council], Kota *nāym* [justice, decision, dispute]) is from Skt. *nyāya-*, Prakrit *ṇāya-, nāya-* [judgment, argument; cf. also Ālu Kuṟumba *nāya*$^{n}$. 'White man' is termed *dore* (pl. *doreve*), fem. *dorecani*, pl. *dorecanive*. Most of this information was provided by P. Sivaraj (1981), and I discussed it with him in detail. Irulas frequently refer to themselves as *nama āḷu* [our people] or *kaṇḍavaru* [lit., those who have been seen, recognized, understood].

[9] Cf. Mathur 1973; also, Bhanu 1976, and *The Ethnographic Report on the Cholanaickans of Kerala* (Kerala, 1976).

[10] According to Kapp, the Muḍuga tribe consists of about 1,500 souls; they live in close proximity to the Pālu Kuṟumbas on the southwestern slope of the Nilgiris.

[11] G. F. Diffloth gives this information for the first time: "Another linguistic community must be mentioned to complete the picture: the Pāl Kurumbas. This is the only Nilgiri tribe with which the Iṟuḷas have maintained regular contact: each Iṟuḷa settlement has a Pāl Kurumba whose title is /modäli/ (Ta. modal 'first'). He is generally the folk-doctor for the village" (1968:10). D. B. Kapp denies this information (in personal communication), and Kapp is undisputedly the best authority on the Pālu Kuṟumbas. However, P. Sivaraj, my Irula informant, definitely supports Diffloth's statement. Sivaraj quoted the instance of the Kuṟumba *modali* of the three villages mentioned above.

[12] Other Kuṟumba tribes (Jēnu Kuṟumbas, Muḷḷu Kuṟumbas, Bëṭṭa Kuṟumbas, and Ūrāḷi Kuṟumbas — as far as we know) live in the low jungles on the northern and northwestern fringes of the Nilgiris and in Wynaad.

[13] I wish to add here some particulars about Dr. Narasimhan, whom I first met on January 31, 1978. Long before our meeting, however, I had heard and read about this admirable man, who had worked from 1942 to 1958 — as a private individual — to lay the foundation for the Adivasi Welfare Association. In 1942, as a young doctor building up a practice in Kotagiri, he was called by a Kuṟumba man who begged him to help his wife in a difficult childbirth. After that fateful encounter, Dr. Narasimhan began single-handedly to do what he could to help the heretofore neglected tribal peoples. Suffering from diabetes and heart disease, and sleeping only three to five hours a day, Dr. Narasimhan worked himself to death at the age of sixty-one.

[14] Paternity is not 'physical,' instead it is determined by a ceremony during which a toy bow and arrow are given to the pregnant woman by one of her husbands. He is the socially accepted father of all children born to the woman, regardless of who the biological father may be, until the occasion arises to change the paternity by having another man give her the bow and arrow. Cf. Emeneau 1967:274.

[15] Cf. Emeneau, "Toda Garments and Embroidery," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* [hereafter referred to as *JAOS*] 57 (1937): 277-89. Unfortunately, 'new' and 'fashionable' colors are being introduced from outside into the art of Toda embroidery by well-meaning people. The traditional Toda norm allows only black, blue, and red thread on a white surface; the newly introduced green and saffron-orange destroys the original patterns.

[16] *Toda Songs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). See especially pp. xlvii and 1004.

[17] The Toda *kwēɬ* is ultimately derived from *kuɻal*, cf. Tamil *kuɻal* [any tube-shaped thing, flute, pipe, etc.]; cf. further Kota *bugīr*, Badaga *buguri*.

[18] The *pōštüiṇy* is a black sarong tied around the waist while the rest of the body remains completely bare.

# 5

## Day-to-Day Life of the Irulas

Irula hamlets are frequently situated on the brow of a steep hill and surrounded by a few dry fields, gardens, and forests, or plantations. Very often they are located at a distance from a path or road, and the access will be only through minor zigzag tracts flanked by bushes, rocks, and forest trees. There are two main types of Irula settlements: larger multiethnic villages, such as Barliar, where different tribes, castes, or both live along with the Irulas; and monoethnic hamlets, such as Garkiyur, where only the members of one Irula-speaking community live.

The headman's house stands at some distance from other houses. There is also a confinement room (*tanikūre*) built on the outskirts of the village, where menstruating women and mothers in postnatal pollution period have to stay; sometimes, as in Garkiyur, the pollution area of a relatively large settlement consists of several separated huts. Temples (*guḍi*) are usually small structures of varying size, built with the same material and in the same shape as houses (*kūre*); they, too, are usually outside the village proper. Courtyards serve mainly as work areas, flat places to dry coffee beans and other products, or arenas for dancing, merrymaking, rites, quarrels, and gossip. Since Irulas keep livestock, their henhouses (*kōyikūre*), huts for sheep (*āḍukūre*), and sheds for goats may also be found at the outskirts of the villages. Keeping of cows or buffaloes is exceptional, but dogs may be seen frequently. There will also be various storerooms, sheds, and platforms to hold grain, household objects, firewood, and drums.

Outside the hamlets are burial-memorial grounds with memorial temples and groves for the Irulas to bury their dead. Memorial temples (*gōpe, koppe*) are built amidst graves (*küyi*). These temples are rectangular structures with thatched roofs; within, against the back walls, are shallow earthen altars where stream-worn memorial stones (*kallu*) are placed in a mound for each dead person of the clans living in the village.

Gardens are quite conspicuous; crops are cultivated on small dry fields, and livestock graze in the forest. Limited trapping, hunting, and food-gathering still continue in the evergreen and deciduous forests that surround almost every Irula settlement. Near the forest-fields and gardens there may stand one or more *paraṇi* [watchtowers].

Social control is carried out by the *kula pancāyat* or tribal council [literally, five-man gathering of the clans], a group of men representing the different clans (*kula*) whose members live in the particular village. The council convenes a meeting both regularly and ad hoc when a problem arises; such meeting is called *nāya* [literally, a dispute, argument, judgment, debate, decision]. And, indeed, at a *nāya* the matter is discussed, debated, and decided.

In every Irula settlement there is a handful of officeholders, but the number of officeholders and their titles varies according to the community (the tribal organization is somewhat different among the Ūrāḷis, Vëṭṭe Kāḍus, and Kasabas). I also had the impression that very small hamlets had a simpler system of dignitaries. It is best therefore to describe a concrete situation as an illustration.

In the village of Kūnjapeṇe[1], there is, above all, the village headman or chieftain (*mūppä, maṇiyakārä*). He is considered the most important person in the settlement. His main function is to preside over the rites of passage, and he is always a member of the *pancāyat*, where he has the main voice. The 'vice-headman' is called *gauḍä*. The *mūppä* and the *gauḍä* do not have to belong to the same clan. The *gauḍä* is the deputy who acts for the headman. In 1981, the great chief of Kūnjapeṇe was Koṇey Cīran of the Pūṅgä clan, a man of about sixty. His modest but nice hut was built on a steep slope somewhat apart from the other houses, right above the main bus-road to Mettupalaiyam. He was a quiet and somewhat slow and taciturn person. In the same year, the *gauḍä* was the shrewd, energetic, very sympathetic Bīmä.

Hierarchically the next important office is that of the ritual specialist or priest, the *būjāri*. At that time Bīmä held the office of the priest, too, which is rather exceptional; I don't know how it happened, and I was given no explanation. It is odd since all these offices are hereditary functions, inherited by the eldest son from his father.

An Irula village (or a group of villages together) may have an Ālu Kuṟumba *modali* who through his magical powers provides safety for the Irulas vis-à-vis dangerous people, e.g., the Muḍugas (the traditional enemies of the Irula).

But in a way the most important men in the village are the *jāttis*, who could be considered 'executive officers' of each *kula*. They are the actual 'managers' of the rites of passage for the members of different clans, and they are always prepared to take care of critical moments in a person's life. The system works so that the *jātti* does **not** belong to the *kula* of which he is the representative[2]: thus, for the Kalkaṭṭi clan, the *jātti* must be of the Pūṅgä clan; for Kuppä *kula*, the *jātti* is a Kalkaṭṭi or a Pūṅgä. If the *jātti* dies, his brother or some other male member of his family becomes *jātti*.

There are no professional magicians (*mandiravādi*) among the Irulas. The contact with the supernatural world of deities and spirits lies within the domain of different *būjāris*. Usually there is a *būjāri* for the village, and there may be more or less important *būjāris* attached to various more or less 'powerful' shrines and deities as well. Inside the *kula* there is no further

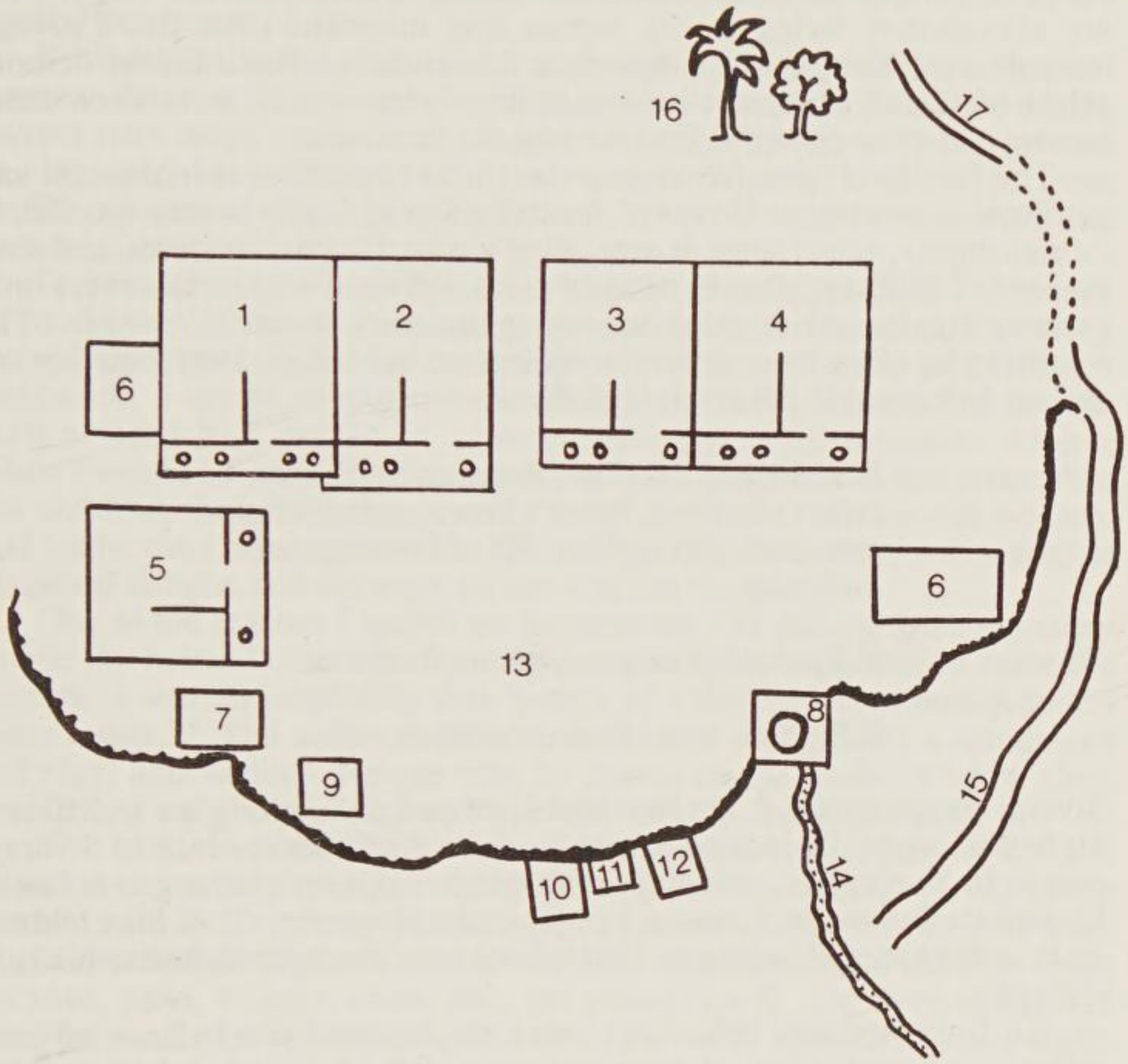



Fig. 14: Ground plan of an Irula settlement

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | houses (*kūre*) | 11 | shed for utensils |
| 6 | storeroom | 12 | drum hut |
| 7 | goat hut (*āḍukūre*) | 13 | courtyard (*kaḷa*) |
| 8 | public bath (open fireplace with big mud pot) | 14 | water channel |
| | | 15 | road to houses (*kūrevuyi*) |
| 9 | chicken hut (*kōyikūre*) | 16 | forest (*cōle*) |
| 10 | firewood | 17 | forest road (*cōlevuyi*) |

division, apart from lineages. The clans are strictly exogamous. Thus my informant Sivaraj, a Kuppä, took a Kalkaṭṭi bride from Cemmaṇaṟe, and his brother took a Koḍuvä bride.

A very important institution is the *kūretoga* [literally, house deity]; these are clan-deities living in the homes and inherited (like the Shōlega *manedevaru*) through the eldest male descendants. Badirän, the demon-priest of Garkiyur, assured me that these clan-deities were even more ancient and more powerful than his *pēy*, his demoness.

The family (*kuḍumbä*) among the Irulas is patrilineal in descent and patrilocal in residence. However, the definition of family is very specific; in its elementary, actual form, it consists of a man, his wife or wives, and their unmarried children. But in its ideal form, the term *kuḍumbä* covers only persons (male and female) belonging to one's father's lineage. The following bit of a conversation that took place in Madras, 1981, between me and my informant P. Sivaraj is significant:

> P.S.: Family (*kuḍumbä*) means my father, father's brother, father's sister, grandfather, grandfather's brothers...all of them are called *kuḍumbä*.
>
> K.Z.: And of course your mother, too.
>
> P.S.: Yes, also...Eee — mother, no!

Sivaraj explained: the mother and "her people" belong to a different *kuḍumbä*, originally located elsewhere from the father's, which in Sivaraj's case is in Kunjapanai. Sivaraj's wife and her relatives belong to a family located in Cemmaṇaṟe, not in Kunjapanai. However, all of his children, male or female, will belong to his *kuḍumbä* (in Kunjapanai) and to his *kula* (Kuppä).

An Irula woman's behavior toward her husband is a balance of great respect and cordiality. A man is expected to show respect toward his parents-in-law; however, there is a great restraint and usually no communication between a son-in-law and his mother-in-law. The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relations are not always smooth; there are tensions and quarrels since they invariably live in the same place — though not, as a rule, under the same roof. A man shows much respect and friendship to his elder sister's husband and to his own wife's elder brother. A woman shows utmost respect to her husband's elder brother and usually does not talk to him. *Au contraire*, a woman speaks freely to her husband's younger brother. A man speaks to his wife's elder sister with respect and cordiality but avoids his wife's younger sister if she is married — though before her marriage they are on free-speaking terms. A woman treats her husband's elder sister with reverence and his younger sister with affection.

The attitude toward one's parents and grandparents is respectful and affectionate. Old people are treated with esteem and tenderness and are taken care of by their families or clans. Brothers usually live in harmony; the elder brother is, of course, the respected one. As a rule, brothers have very affectionate relationships with their sisters, particularly with younger ones. Fathers usually treat their daughters with great affection.

Irula houses vary in type and size. The traditional Irula houses are detached, though some are built in rows next to one another. The most common house (*kūre*) is the side-gabled hut consisting of only one room. The rectangular base is earthen; it has a front porch, wattle-and-daub walls, and a thatched roof (nontraditional houses have tiles). Under the roofs are beams; there are no ceilings.

With regard to the material for walls (*gōḍe*), there are three types of houses: those with uncovered wickerwork walls (split bamboo, sticks, banana stem strips woven into poles), those with wickerwork walls covered in clay, and, nontraditionally, those with brick/stone walls. The most traditional method of constructing an Irula *kūre* is to weave wickerwork into vertical poles and thatch the whole with grass or leaves.

In front, the house usually has a veranda (*düṇe, diṇe*, Ūrāḷi *tiṇe*) made of mud (*maṇṇu*); on the veranda one can relax in the shade of the eaves extending over it. It was on the *diṇe* that I conducted most of my fieldwork. I would simply come and sit down on the veranda and unpack rolls of betel leaf, parcels of tobacco, and other small presents. After a while I would be joined by the natives, who usually came in this order: first the children, then the very old and very young men, then the old women, and lastly, even a young female. When I spoke in Irula, there was a gasp of surprised delight, and the work on the veranda began.

One of the reasons I stayed on the veranda and did not force my entry inside the house is the rule that non-Irulas are not supposed to enter the houses. I was told explicitly that "people of a different community do not enter inside."[3] The walls are sometimes painted outside with a solution of red clay, and various designs may be drawn on the walls in white clay. Inside they may be plastered and leveled with clay, dung, or both.

The interior is divided into roughly two equal sections by an earthen partition extending inward from the front wall. One section serves as the kitchen with the fireplace, another as the living room. Next to the rear wall, a shallow earthen platform is constructed to store household utensils: light, incense, pans, vessels, mats, etc., are placed on it. Or there is another smaller mud platform attached to the rear wall, specifically for light, incense, and the worship of *kūretoga* [domestic deities]; such a platform is termed *dīpamadulu*. The interior fireplace (*ole, oḍuppa*) is built next to the left front wall. Lastly, there is usually a storage platform above the central earthen partition-wall, either earthen or made of split bamboo; this storage platform is termed *cappara*[4] or aṭṭi[5], and a delightful popular droll story (recounted in chapter 8) is told about it.

People sleep on mats on the veranda or inside the house, depending on the time of the year and personal preference. During daytime, mats are rolled up and stored in one of the corners.

Before entering an Irula home, one should wash one's feet. In any case, sandals must be left outside. Only those who are called *kaṇḍavaru*, i.e., Irulas, are allowed to enter. Even among Irulas, strictly speaking, no stranger should come inside the house, only family members and relatives. All social activities therefore take place on the veranda and in front of the house. Also, no menstruating woman is allowed to enter the house.

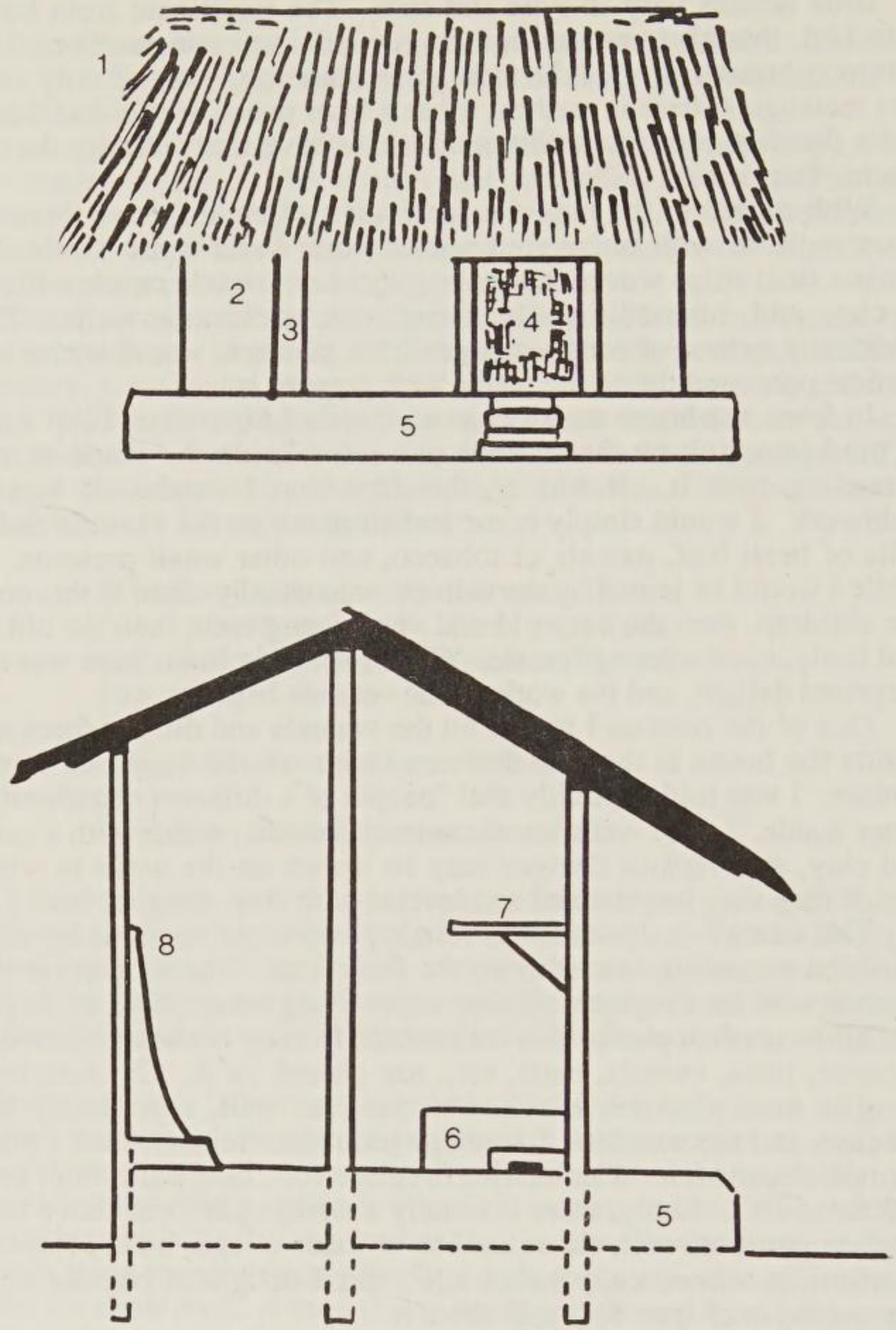



Fig. 15: Traditional Irula house (*kūre*)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | roof (Mele Nāḍu *nëḍuga*, Vëṭṭe Kāḍu *mogalu*) | 5 | veranda (*diṇe, duṇe*) |
| 2 | wall (*gōḍe*) | 6 | fireplace (*ole, oḍuppa*) |
| 3 | wooden pillar (*marakambu*) | 7 | platform for storage (*cappara*) |
| 4 | entrance (*vāca*) with door (*padil*) set in wooden framework (Mele Nāḍu *daraga*, Vëṭṭe Kāḍu *niluvu*) | 8 | lamp stand (*dīpa madulu*) |

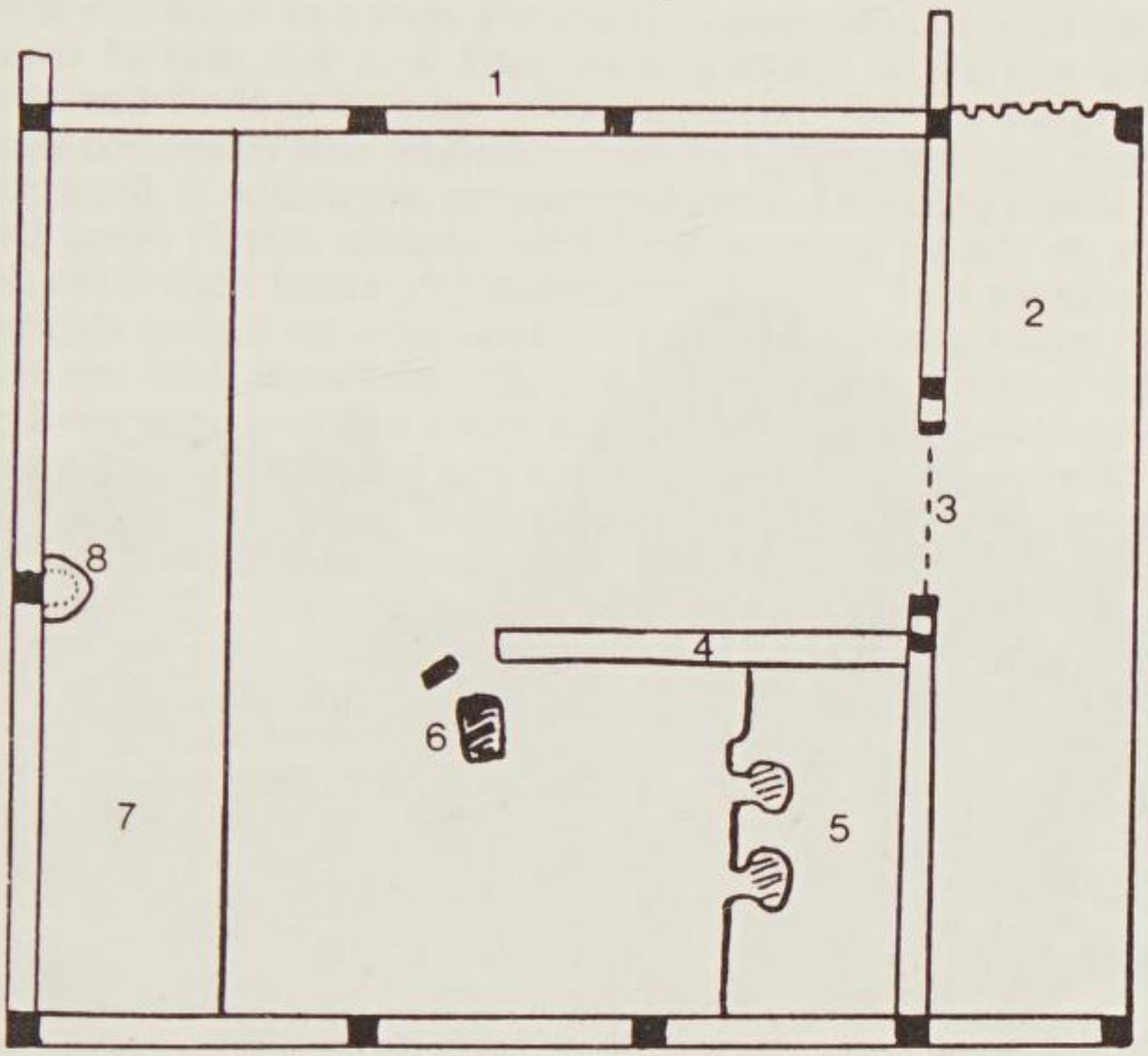



Fig. 16: Inside of a traditional Irula house

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 woven bamboo and daub wall | 5 fireplace |
| 2 porch | 6 massala stone |
| 3 entrance | 7 raised platform |
| 4 earthen partition wall | 8 lamp stand |

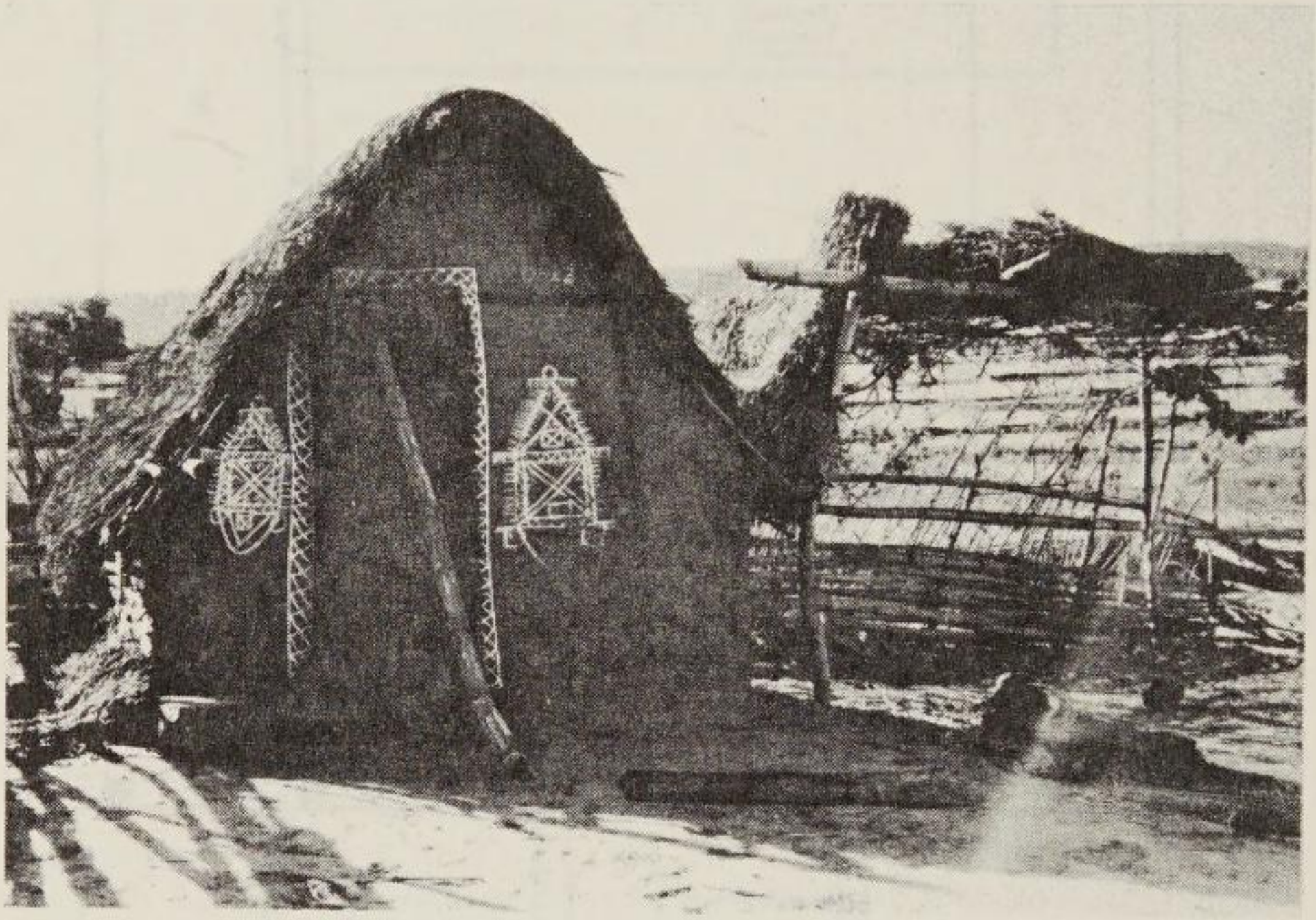


Fig. 17: An Ūrāḷi house in Gundri

As elsewhere in India, men are much faster in adopting the modern, imported type of dress. The traditional men's dress is a kind of lungi called *muṇḍu* or *kaccemuṇḍu*, tied around the waist and reaching the knees; or, in very hot weather and while working, they wear only the *nëḍukëṭṭu*, a loincloth that is tied around the waist and covers the pudenda and partially the buttocks, but it does not reach down to the knees. *Vēṭṭi* or *vēṣṭi* has been imported from the plains; however, even this typical Hindu dress, the dhoti, is worn in two ways: as a short garment (just under the knees) in the older, traditional fashion and as a long, loose garment in the non-Brahmin Tamilian and Badaga fashion. The upper part of the body is most frequently completely bare (especially with the Ūrāḷis), or it may be covered with shirts and, in wintertime, sweaters and coats. Often one carries a large or small towel (*tuṇḍu, dubele*), and some persons, usually as a status symbol, cover their heads with turbans (*urumbele*). Feet are most often bare; sandals (*mëṭṭu*) are worn rarely. The most interesting pieces of male attire are the *kōci*, inner loincloth, and especially the *ḍokanni*, the loinstring. Boys wear this from a very early age to guard against the evil eye (*dusti*), for the safety and health of the body; it is universally believed that if it were not worn, the man's testicles would grow too large and heavy, his penis would be disfigured, and his sex life would be thus impaired.

Comparable to the *ḍokanni* are the two prevailing types of pudenda coverings worn by women. They are called *tāy* and are made of silver. One type is heart-shaped, often with symbols of the sun and the moon, and measures approximately 2 by 3 inches to 3 by 4 inches. Another type, worn by boys as well, is a metal string with a cylindrical receptacle that may contain *vibhūti* [sacred ash], a *mantra* [magical formula], or some other object with protective magical properties; the size of these receptacles is about 2 by ½ inches.

The traditional dress for Irula women was a double fold of wrapped cloth, extending from the waist to the knees. While "the upper part of their bodies with their bosoms were nude" (Shortt 1869), nowadays it is exceptional to see an Irula woman whose breasts are bare. The skirt, tied around the waist and reaching the knees, is called *muṭṭikëṭṭu*; it is now accompanied by another piece of cloth tied around the breasts (*maḍikëṭṭu*). Another prevalent type of traditional Irula female dress that wraps around the body and reaches the ankles is the *vaṇṇa*,[6] which is knotted above the breasts, in the back or over the right shoulder. It is usually of a single dark color: indigo blue, green, dark red, saffron. Sometimes the *vaṇṇa* is wrapped around the body just above the breasts, wrought tightly beneath the armpits, tied across the chest, and knotted on the back. However, nontraditionally, Irula women have adopted the combination of the sari (*cīle*) and blouse (*ravike*) imported from the plains.

There are still some traditional pieces of jewelry that may occasionally be seen, although they are fast disappearing in favor of the ubiquitous, horrible plastic: the wristlets for both hands (*kakkaṇa*)[7]; the necklet of silver, brass, or copper (*nëge, kāppu*); the necklace (*caṅgili*); toe rings (*minji*); bangles (*vëḷe*); earrings (*kadukku, kādukamalu, kādukallu*); and especially various beads (*kallu*; literally, stones) and the much-praised cowry shells (*kiḷinji ōḍu, kiḷinji kallu, caṅgu*).

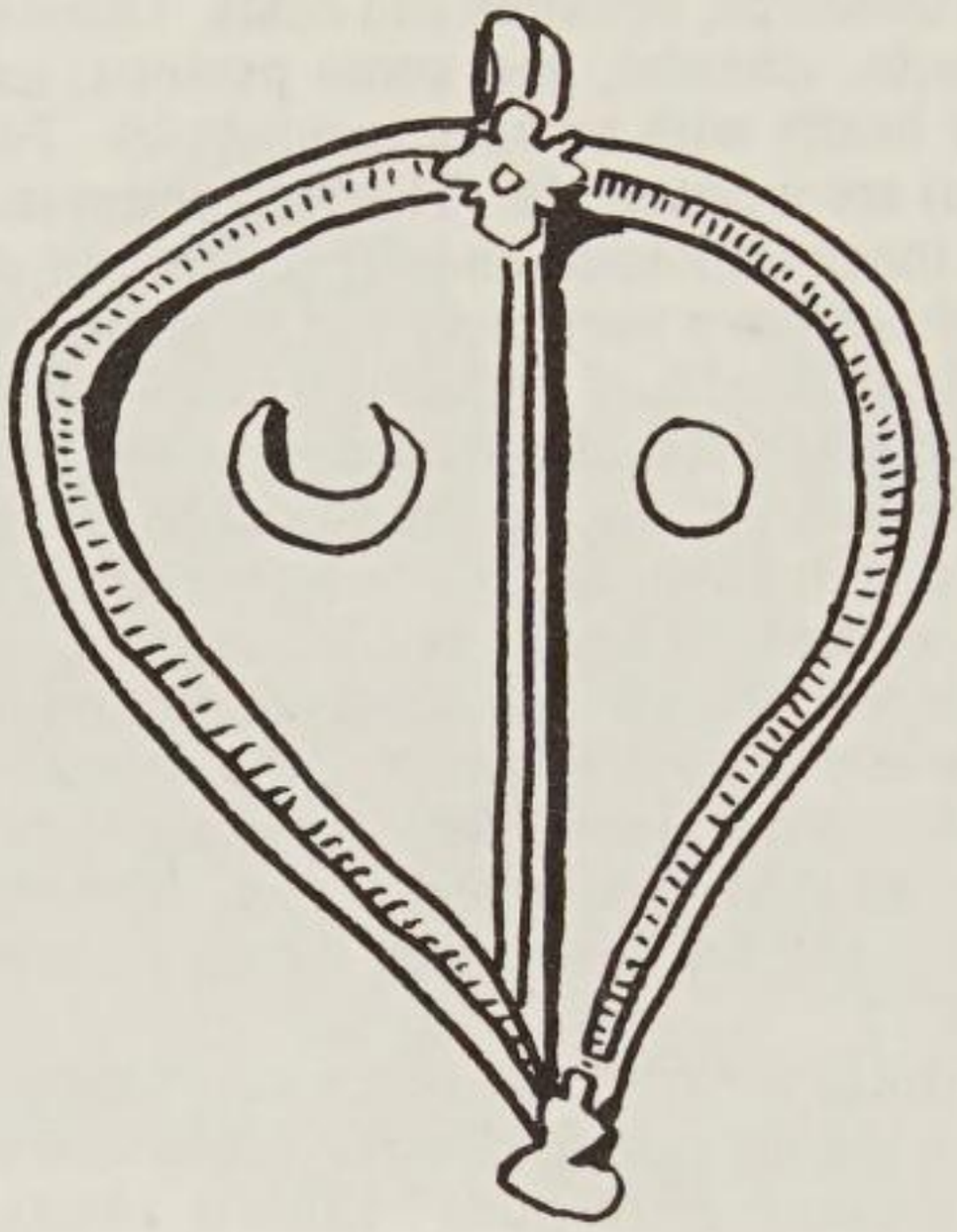


Fig. 18: Pudenda covering

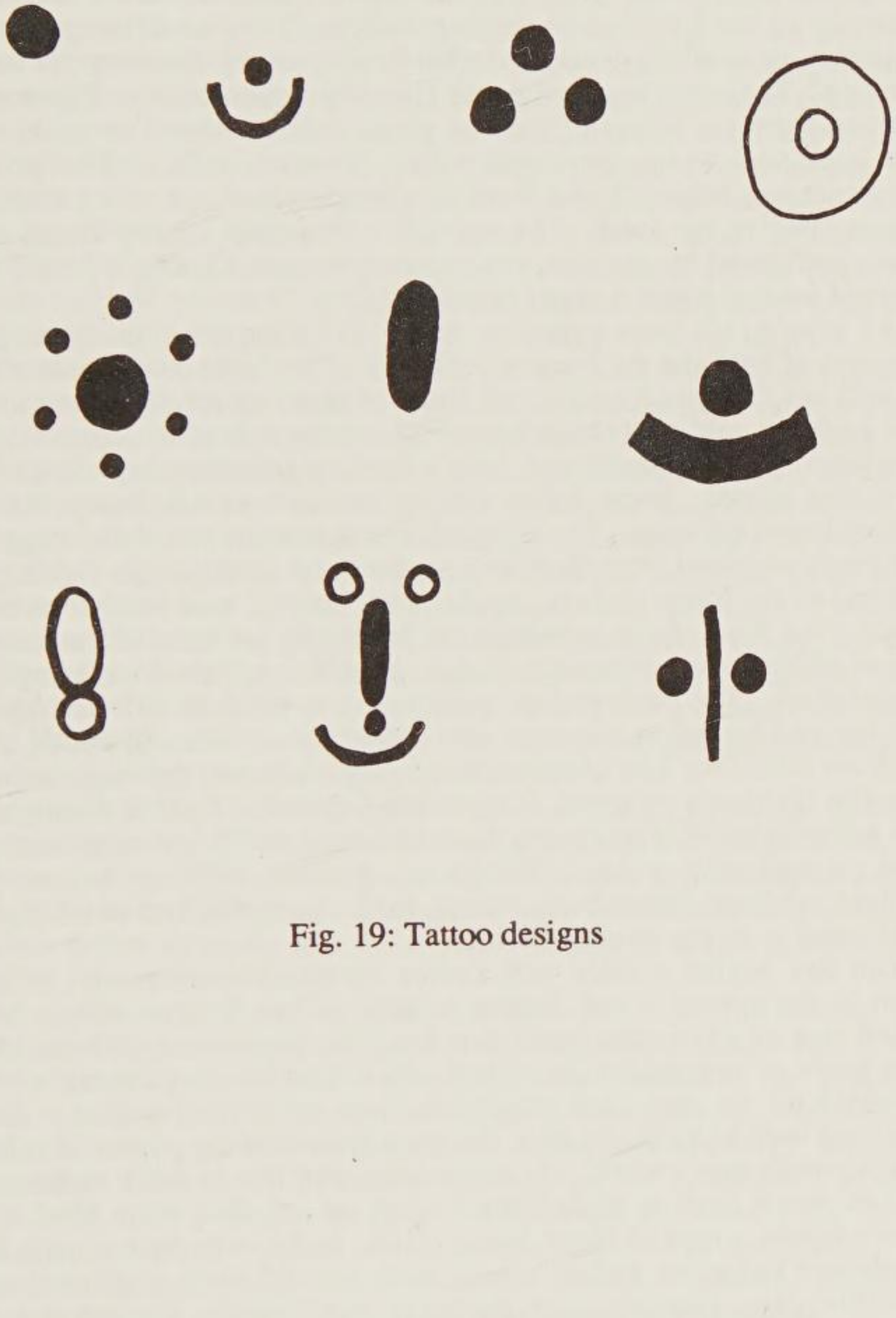


Fig. 19: Tattoo designs

Traditionally, an Irula woman (*ërɨlci*) wore a gold *mūkutti* (*mūkkukkallu*) in the left nostril, her hair done in a bunch on the side of her head, a mass of glass bead necklaces, and brass or glass ornaments in the helix of the ear. She also wore brass, or even palm-leaf roll, ornaments (*kād'ōle*) in her earlobes; cowry shell pendants; a heavy roll of black beads as a necklace; steel, brass, lead, or glass bangles and rings in plenty; and armbands on her upper arms. If married, she wore four *minjis* [toe rings] on the two middle toes of each foot. Unfortunately, such a sight is most rare in our days, but tattooing is still encountered frequently.

Various parts of the body may be tattooed, but tattoos are found most frequently on the forehead, in varying designs. They are often geometrical ornaments, or symbols connected with fertility or representing the sun and the moon. Tattooing is called *pacce* [literally, green color]. Pigments are prepared from the juices of various plants, coffee beans, or both, mixed with soot and water, woman's milk, or cow's milk. The pricking instrument was originally the thorn of a jungle plant, but now a number of various needles are used. The operation may take several hours and is always performed by an elder, experienced woman. During my field trips I observed several tattoo designs (see Fig. 19).

As a rule, all Irula-speaking tribes eat almost anything, with the exception of beef and the meat of buffaloes. They are certainly meat-eaters and will eat mutton (*āḍukaṛi*); all kinds of deer, especially *kūrve* and the large *kaḍame*; wild goat (*kēa*); hares and rabbits, snared in nests; wild pigs (*cōlepandi, parādupändi*); and jungle fowl, pigeons, and quail, knocked down with stones. Some Irulas will eat rats and, as a delicacy, the large monitor lizard (*viruga*). The diet consists, however, mainly of vegetarian food partly obtained from their own gardens and small jungle-fields, partly gathered in the forest (tubers, mushrooms, honey), and partly bartered or bought. The most characteristic of the foodstuffs gathered in the forest are various edible tubers and roots (*kaṅgu, kēcāṅku*) and the increasingly rare honey (*tēnu*). The most typical grains used to prepare different kinds of porridge and pancakes are *rāgi, rāyi* (*Eleusine corocana*); *pāṇḍi, päṇḍi* (*Panicum italicum*); *kīre* (*Amaranthus fariniferus*); and the imported wheat *gōdumbe* (*Triticum vulgare*). Vegetarian (*cōṛucāṛu*) food is distinguished from nonvegetarian (*kaṛimpaṭṭu, kaṛicōṛu*) food, but this distinction has no ritual or polluting value. Pumpkins, gourds, melons, beans, peas, eggplant, cabbage, cucumbers, onions, garlic, potatoes, and sweet potatoes are all eaten in plenty when available.

The day begins usually with coffee or, much more rarely, with tea, which is the overall South Indian pattern. Then follows either freshly cooked rice or *pāya cōṛu* [cold rice from the previous day] with *cāṛu*, a sauce made of vegetables (another South Indian Hindu pattern), which is accompanied by pancakes prepared from traditional grains. Of the vegetables used to make the *cāṛu*, the great favorite is the potato (*dorekaṅgu*; literally, white man's tuber). At lunch time, they like to drink coffee with a 'modern' snack such as *vëḍe* [small, salty, spiced doughnuts fried in oil], or even *bōnda*, a type of North Indian cake. In the evening the main foods are various baked or boiled tubers with rice (if available) and, again, vegetable *cāṛu*, possibly with pancakes and coffee. *Kaṛicōṛu*, — i.e., nonvegetable food, consisting of rice with meat — is rather exceptional. The eating habits of the tribals have undergone profound changes during the last 150 years; nowadays their diet is a mixture of a few traditional items and imported food and beverage.

A truly festive food for the Irulas is *kōyikaṟi* [chicken curry] prepared either from domestic or jungle fowl. When I asked whether there was a very special, typical, 'Irula-only' food, the following items were mentioned: *kĕ̄akaṟi* [wild goat curry], considered excellent; *kūrvekari* [barking deer curry], also considered excellent; and especially *virugakari* [curry made with the large monitor lizard], considered a delicacy. Fish is eaten with much enthusiasm and is either roasted, or dried by the sun (*karvāḍu*) or by fire (*vartadu*). Goat's and cow's milk are drunk, but rarely. After a goat has kidded and its milk is thick, the milk is gathered into a thick lump (*pālkaṭṭi*) from which a kind of cottage cheese called *gēṇu* or *gēṇupālu* is made. This white cheese is also made from cow's milk, which, though rarely available, is much appreciated. Buttermilk (*majige, mōru*), curds or yogurt (*teguru, teyiru, mucuru, mocuru*), and butter (*tuppa, vĕṇṇe*) are also consumed. Eggs are eaten fried. Food is eaten by hand, usually from *kĕṇa*, plates made from brass, aluminum, or glass. Only on festive occasions is food eaten from palm leaves (*ele, tēkkeyele*). Alcohol, betel, and tobacco are greatly appreciated. Alcoholic beverages are drunk at all feasts where dancing and singing occur. Apart from the imported *cārāya* [liquor], a domestic (and of course illegal) procedure has been adopted to produce a strong kind of beer called *uranīru* [literally, strong liquid]. It is manufactured from the bark of certain trees mixed with jaggery [coarse brown sugar]. The bark is termed *paṭṭe*, and one of the most common trees used in this process is the red-barked *vēṅkai* (*Pterocarpus marsupium*).

It is more than probable that the original, traditional subsistence-basis of the Irulas was day-to-day collecting of food from the jungle and hunting of small game. Some remnants of this thrilling occupation may be witnessed even today. At present, however, the Irulas are incipient small-scale agriculturalists with an underlying hunting-gathering ideology. They now obtain more of their food supply from small-scale gardening and dry-field agriculture than from their own hunting and gathering. In addition, there are wages from daily labor on plantations. But given a chance, the Irulas, like the Kuṟumbas, still clearly prefer the rare hunting-gathering over tilling as the more prestigious and thrilling occupation.

The transition from hunting-gathering, via shifting cultivation, to small-scale agriculture and plantation work has been rather traumatic. A number of tribes — some Ūrāḷis and Irulas, many Kuṟumbas and Muḍugas, almost all Paṇiyans, some Shōlegas, and others — have been forced to undergo the transition rather abruptly and even under duress, and this resulted in a number of destructive processes.

The contractors created new and artificial needs for the tribals: they encouraged them to become addicted to opium, tobacco, and alcohol; they insisted that to be 'civilized' and 'respectable' meant to be 'properly' dressed, in order to sell them ornaments, unnecessary clothes, and items of luxury. Foreign, pseudorevolutionary, disruptive ideology was also imported into tribal areas. When the tribals refused to be tempted, laborers from outside were brought in; they depleted and devastated the forest, played havoc with the tribal sexual mores and social safeguards, and imposed values of Hindu caste-society. Money lenders, peddlers, merchants, usurers, and political agitators followed the contractors.

I have heard sad stories told directly or indirectly by and about Todas, Kotas, Kuṟumbas, and Irulas: hair-raising accounts of cruelty and humiliation concerning the exploitation and suppression of serfs originally belonging to the Shōlega and Paṇiyan communities. Go and visit the market place at Ootacamund; you will see Todas reduced to the state of

demoralized drunkards pawning a silver necklace one hundred and fifty years old to raise a few miserable rupees — never to see the jewel again. I shall have more to say about the sad plight of these tribes below. Here I want to stress simply but forcefully that the contacts of the tribes of South India with modern civilizations have been largely detrimental to them and that the accompanying benefits of civilization have not been made equally available to the tribals.

The Irulas must have begun small-scale garden cultivation about two centuries ago, since Buchanan, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, speaks of Irulas cultivating "gardens and fields" in the slash-and-burn manner, which he calls "Cotucadu fashion" (i.e., *kaṭṭu* 'to cut' + *kāḍu* 'forest'). He also mentions plantain and lime trees, and a new specimen of Amaranthus, "the seed of which they grind to flour, and use as a farinaceous substance." In 1832, Harkness observed bananas, chilies, edible roots, jacks, limes, and oranges growing in Irula gardens. In 1909, Thurston added castor, maize, pigeon peas, and cucurbitaceous plants. Today the Irulas grow at least fifty-four species of plants, according to Noble who investigated Irula economy at Koppayur in 1963.

The gardens vary greatly in structure. They are of three main types: (1) multilayer gardens, usually giving the impression of an abundant hodgepodge of plants; (2) single-layer gardens; and (3) kitchen gardens, which are smaller and close to the houses. Dibbles or crowbar substitutes, assorted hoes, hoe forks, and knives are the implements used by the Irulas in their gardens. The most typical implements may be seen in Figure 21.

The gardens are termed *āḷi* in Irula. Prohibition of slash-and-burn cultivation has prevented the Irulas from clearing the forest whenever they desired. However, even today, they and some other tribes practice small-scale swidden agriculture — which is basically a neolithic type of cultivation — on their dry fields on the slopes of the hills. A few generations ago, *kaṭṭu-kāḍu* agriculture was the dominant mode of production next to hunting, trapping, and gathering. Up to about 1870, the Irulas were basically still a neolithic people with important residue of paleolithic patterns of behavior.

Slash and burn is a technique for opening up and bringing under cultivation a patch of forest land. A patch of jungle is cut down: the standing growth is first cleared by an ax (*kōḍali*) or machete (*äṟuvāḷu*), and after a period of drying, the accumulated debris is burned off. The ash thus obtained is spread evenly all over the land. Then, Būmi Tāyi [Mother Earth] is ritually worshipped so that she might pardon the men for injuring her with the digging stick. Only then does the sowing commence. Seeds, which are held in the right hand, are dropped into the holes made by the digging stick held in the left hand; they then walk on the holes to cover them with earth. The seeds are dibbled at random in all directions. Before millet is broadcast, the field is prepared by turning the sod with the hoe (*mamëṭṭi*).

A cleared plot is cultivated for one or two seasons, with the same cycles of crops being grown on the land; then the plot is abandoned and left fallow for three to five years. The cultivators move on to repeat the process on a nearby tract. The original area is then opened again for another cycle of cultivation and fallow, usually by the same family or group. Typically the period of fallow is several times the period of use.

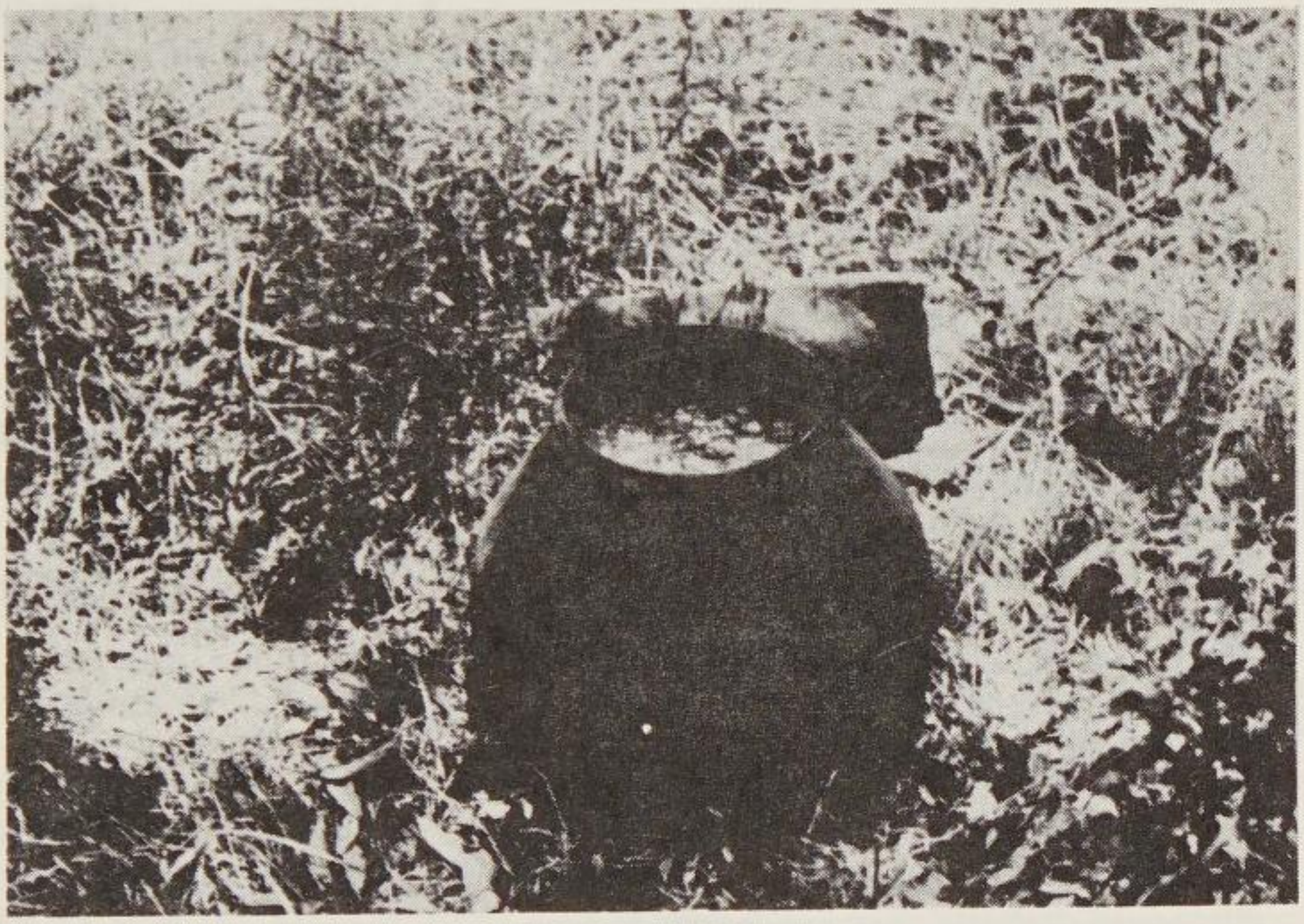


Fig. 20: Illegal manufacture of liquor, Marvahalla (1978)

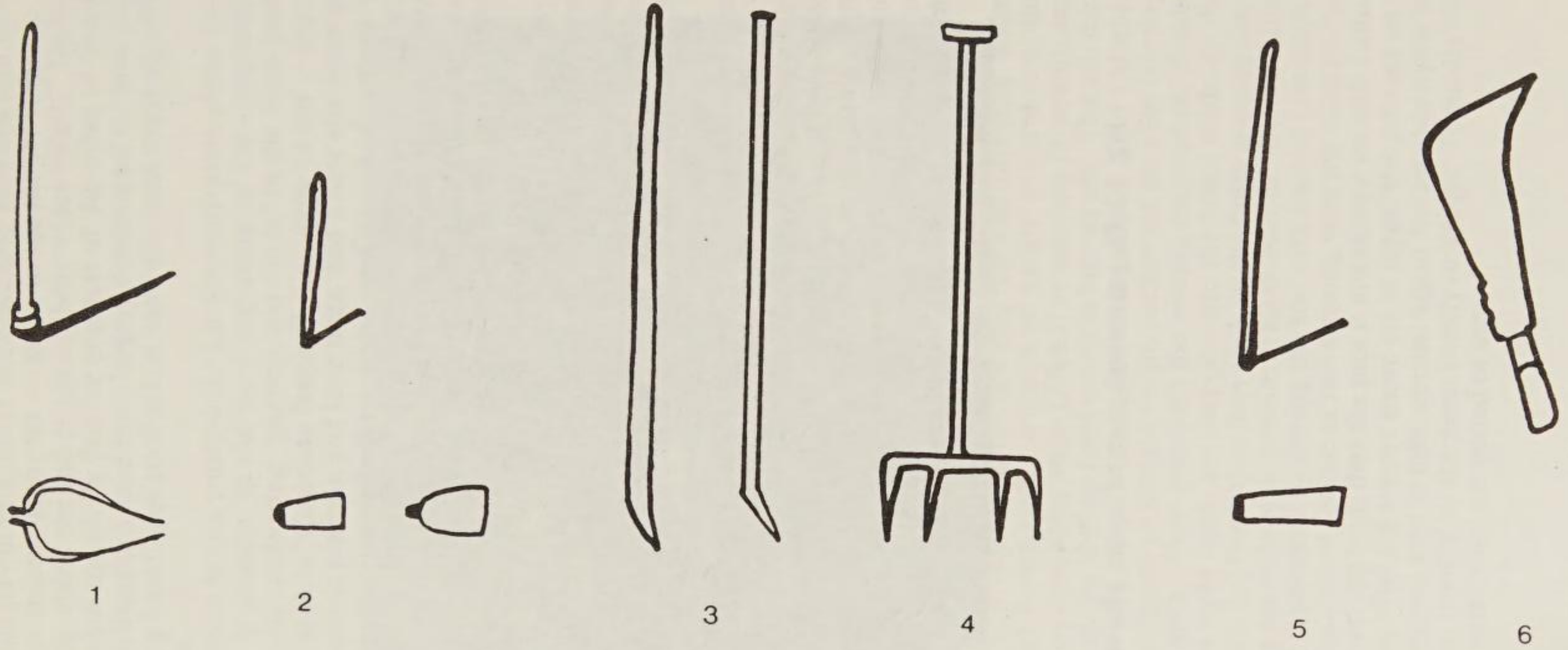



Fig. 21: Irula tools and implements

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 hoe fork | 3 dibble, digging stick (*āṟe, gaḍepāṟe*) | 5 hoe |
| 2 weeding hoe | 4 fork (*muḷḷu*, if large; *kottu*, if small) | 6 machete |

Within the yearly routine, Irulas begin to clear and prepare their small fields in May, after the great *abba* [festival]. Ashes from burnt plants are spread, and the earth is tilled with hoes and hoe forks. Seed is sown mainly in either late April or early May, after the so-called mango showers, but should these showers fail, sowing may be postponed until June. Growing plants are weeded in June and July. Excepting the little millet, grains are harvested mainly during August and September; little millet in December and January. Irulas use small sickles for removing grain heads (amaranth stems are cut off with knives). Stubble left on fields provides fodder for livestock. Irulas use threshing sticks (*taḍi*, Ūrāḷi *done*) to thresh all their grain. When thoroughly sun-dried, grain is stored in large woven bamboo baskets; these grain chests, sometimes kept on platforms, are stored inside the houses.

Irulas have kept cows, goats, and chickens since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. They also rear sheep, but according to my informants, the main domesticated animal is the goat. Fowl and goats are both food sources and ritual sacrificial animals. Harkness (1832) witnessed Irulas sacrificing cocks and a goat by slitting their throats. Shortt (1869) mentioned cock and goat sacrifices to Māri. Irulas now tend to give up bloody sacrifices, but I was told repeatedly (1968, 1976, 1978, 1981) by informants from Kūnjapeṇe and Garkiyur that cocks, goats, and even sambar deer are still sacrificed before grain sowing, harvest, and at some religious festivals (*toga, abba*). Flesh of birds and animals that are sacrificially slaughtered is eaten. Cows are kept only very rarely for milk. Pigs are conspicuous by their absence in Irula villages proper, though a few pigs (*ūrupändi*) are reared by Ūrāḷis. But all Irulas will relish eating the meat of wild hog (*cōlepandi, parādupändi*).

All Irulas, but in particular the Mele Nāḍus and Kasabas, are employed by the forest department in plantation work on tea and coffee plantations and by the Badagas, Tamilians, and white land- and plantation-owners in field and garden work. Men are engaged to do the hard work such as felling trees, sawing wood, and cutting the jungle down; while women and youngsters perform the easier jobs such as weeding or guarding crops. For decades, the Irulas have been considered good and reliable plantation laborers. Their work on plantations has a very far-reaching and deep influence on Irula culture since it is while working there that they come into close and prolonged contact with other Nilgiri communities (Muḍugas, Kuṛumbas, Badagas) and, what is more important, with coolies (mostly Tamil Harijans) 'imported' from the plains. Hence, one may observe the ever-increasing diffusion of Tamil non-Brahmin, low-caste, or Harijan cultural traits among the Irulas; the use of names such as Sivarāj or Vaḷḷi, which are as much of Tamil origin as the occasional worship of Murugan or Aiyappan; and on the walls of Irula houses, the cheap color-prints of Hindu gods, political heroes, and film stars. An Irula village may even resound with Hindi, Kannaḍa, or Malayalam songs whose source is a transistor radio. The two Irula communities that are the most affected by these contacts are some Mele Nāḍu groups and the Kasabas. To my knowledge, there are only a few Mele Nāḍu settlements that have remained relatively unaffected (e.g., Garkiyur). Among the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas, work on plantations is rather exceptional; more frequent is the work in the forest department. The least influenced Irula-speaking community is, to my knowledge, the Irula Ūrāḷis.

Fig. 22: The Ūrāḷi village of Gundri

Thus, the economic basis of the Irulas on the whole is very complex. No statistics are available, but my informed guess is that the process of swidden cultivation on dry fields and gardens is the chief source of livelihood, which may account for as much as 50 percent, if not more, of Irula income. Next comes labor for daily wages on plantations, for the Badaga and other land-owners, and for the forest department. Hunting and gathering comes only third, and barter for Irula products last. In terms of the four Irula-speaking communities, the very tentative figures in percentages are as follows:

| | Mele Nāḍu | Vëṭṭe Kāḍu | Kasaba | Ūrāḷi |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Garden and dry field agriculture | 50% or more | 40% or more | 40% or more | 40% |
| Labor for daily wages | 30% | 20% | 40% | 15% |
| Hunting-gathering | 15% | 30% | 15% | 35% |
| Barter | 3% | 6% | 5% | 10% |
| Additional sources of income (priesthood, etc.) | 2% | 4% | — | — |

Table 1: Sources of Irula income

There are certain specific features pertaining to the economy of the various groups. Thus the Kasabas, who live in the Mysore Ditch between the Nilgiri massif and the river Moyar, serve as livestock herders for the Badagas; Noble (1968) speaks of "Badaga-Kasuva livestock centers" where buffaloes and cattle are herded by Kasabas for Badagas. Another such feature is the bartering by Mele Nāḍu and Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas of specific forest products, such as honey, resin, incense, punk, and bamboo artifacts. These they exchange or sell to neighbors, such as Kotas and Todas, or low-landers. Irulas have also served as priests to Nilgiri Raṅga, and this ritual performance by Irula priests and their assistants yields additional income for the men involved. Ūrāḷis living at lower elevations sell or barter fuel wood at the market of Satyamangalam.

Hunting and food-gathering formed a distinctive way of making a living that is sometimes known as the foraging way of life. It seems to have been the original occupation of the indigenous paleolithic ancestors of the Irulas before they came into contact with neolithic peoples and before they were

'Dravidianized.' In energy returns, hunting is a less rewarding activity than gathering; in any event, vegetable food provides the major part of the Irula diet. On the other hand, hunting must have been the most prestigious activity of Irula men.

Hunting presupposes a number of basic skills and techniques: tracking, stalking, shooting, killing, butchering, snaring, fishing, and capturing small game. The goal of hunting is to kill game to provide food; killing for sport is unknown. The only other sort of killing practiced by Irulas is ritual killing.

All hunting activities have three basic steps: the preparations for the hunt (usually in the evening preceding the day of the hunt), the act of hunting, and the killing and butchering. The act of hunting may take several forms, and the Irulas distinguish among them: snaring, a technique used more often nowadays than previously, especially by older men and young boys; mobile hunting with dogs and killing big game with spears or guns, nowadays almost obsolete; frequently practiced small-game hunting, usually with spears, clubs, or walking sticks; knocking down game birds by throwing stones or sticks; and fishing.

It is useful to introduce the subject of hunting with a brief glossary of the terms used in the context. The hunt or hunting is called *vēṭṭe*, and the hunter is *vēṭṭekārä*. It may be important that these terms are most probably connected etymologically[8] to the general term for animal, *vēṇḍu*[9]: all animals were hunting animals, to be killed and to provide food for the ancestors of the Irulas. Also, though today the Irulas do not use bows and arrows, there is an old name for them that seems to be derived from the pan-Dravidian word for bow (**vil*): they were called *viliyaru, biliyaru, milliyaru*, etc.; cf. Tamil *villiyar* 'bowmen, Irulas' (Zvelebil 1973:7-8). These two linguistic facts point to the hunting past of the Irulas.

Writers in the nineteenth century still mentioned Irula hunting frequently; Buchanan (1807) spoke of the Irulas using nets to catch wild fowl (*cōle kōyi, Gallus sonneratii*) and using deadfalls weighted with stones to kill tigers. Harkness (1832) mentioned them ensnaring and hunting wild animals. Ouchterlony (1849) listed muntjak, sambar, spotted deer, and other middle-sized and large game being hunted with much skill. According to Thurston (1909), by the early 1900s Irulas had started using guns. There are even reports of Irulas hunting, in the past, for wild boars.

Nowadays, however, hunting has deteriorated. The clearance of forests in the surrounding of original Irula settlements has considerably reduced the scope for hunting. Also, due to strict game controls, Irulas may no longer hunt big game; and yet I was assured by my Garkiyur informants that once each year there is a great ritual hunt for the large sambar deer as the sacrificial animal for the *pēy* of Garkiyur.

I discussed hunting on many occasions during my four trips to the field. The prevalent mood was then a mixture of pride, nostalgia, caution, shame, and fear. I was especially keen to gather facts about the traditional ways of hunting — what they call *namma pāya kālatti vēṭṭe* [our ancient-times hunt]. According to my data, fifty years ago, the Irulas hunted either with guns (*vēḍi*), dogs, or both, or with the help of traps and snares. In older days (*ā kālatti*), the most frequently used weapons were *īṭṭi* [spear], *ūndillu* [sling], and *vele* [net]. It is interesting that the bow and arrow were never mentioned, though they are certainly known, and significant that the weapons are manufactured almost completely by the Irulas themselves. I was specifically told that they make their own snares and traps (*kaṇṇi,*

*ḍällu*), nets (*vele piṇuga*), and of course, slings (*ūndivillu, ūndillu*), and even the wooden parts of guns.

The first type of hunting, which only a few 'rich' Irulas could afford, is shooting large game with guns. The proud possessor of the weapon takes several men along, four of whom are sent in different directions in the jungle to track and stalk the game. They beat sticks, shout, whistle, and make all kinds of noise to drive the large animals, particularly the *kaḍame* deer, toward the hunter who is waiting, sitting on a well-chosen strategic point with his gun. After shooting the animal, he takes the hind legs for himself and then cuts out the liver (*cūḍu*). A portion of the cooked liver is placed on the leaf of the *ulume* tree. The hunter bows to the god of the hunt (Vēṭṭetoga or Biliyatoga), said to be a very ancient and very powerful deity — so ancient that his proper (personal) name was forgotten (literally, *vēṭṭetoga* 'hunt-god' and *biliyatoga* 'great god'). The god of the hunt is rarely properly worshipped — only once every five to ten years — by a very big feast with animal sacrifices (personal communication by P. Sivaraj, 1981). He offers the *ulume* leaf with the part of the liver to the god and eats the rest of the liver, and then he distributes what is leftover of the game to the other men.

A man who has no gun raises and trains dogs for one year. The following year he takes his dogs into the forest to hunt the mouse deer (*kūrve*). The dogs either catch the animal or chase it into a crevice. The hunter kindles fire with the help of his fire-kindling stone, iron, cotton, or dry grass, blowing violently so as to produce a lot of smoke and larger flames, eventually setting fire to the dry vegetation in the crevice. Thus he smokes out the game. As it comes out, he gives it a blow on the right front leg, and then kills it with a stone. Then he dresses the animal, takes out the liver, offers part of it on the *ulumeyele* to the hunt-god, eats the rest, and takes the animal home.

The poorest hunter watches the jungle path where the animals such as *cōlepandi* [wild boar], small deer, or various large birds roam, and there sets traps and snares of three kinds: falling traps (*ḍällu*) arranged to fall on the animal and thus catch it (on the principle of the mousetrap); snares with rope (*kaṇṇi*); and snares with net (*vele*). When the animal is caught, the same procedure is repeated: after killing it, the deity is worshipped by offering it of part of the animal's liver on the *ulume* leaf.

When the game is brought from the forest, it is prepared as *käṛi*, which will be eaten first by the women and children of the village; the men will eat only later. This may be a significant detail surviving from a very ancient time when the foraging way of life was still the only economy of the Irulas. Before the villagers eat, however, they always prostrate themselves, pray, and offer some food to the house gods.

Gathering a wide variety of food is still often practiced. It is obvious that wild yams (generally called *kaṅgu* or *kēcāṅku*) have always formed an important part of the Irula diet. Buchanan mentioned them in 1807, and Harkness (1832) said that the yam that the Irulas gathered in the forest was called "Erular root," so typical was it for them as their staple food. In 1868, although the Irulas practiced rudimentary agriculture, the main source of their subsistence was still hunting and gathering. Shortt is quite explicit in describing them as nomadic people, moving in small communities through the forest, "living on what they can obtain from the jungles...through which they wander, rather than labor and cultivate" (1869:257).

There is wide variety of plants, medicinal herbs, medicinal roots, and leafy vegetables (*dāgu, coppu*) gathered in the jungle nowadays. But the most prestigious item collected among all Nilgiri tribes is honey (*tēnu, tēnu*). It is used not only as a sweetener but also as a medicine and as an important product to be sold, bartered, or both. Indeed, one of the Nilgiri tribes is called Honey Kurumbas (Jēnu Kuṟumbaru).

Honey is mentioned as favorite food in classical Tamil literature. One old Tamil poem, from A.D. 180, mentions what seems to be tribal economy; it says that there are "those who exchange honey (*tēṉ*) and edible tubers (*kiḻaṅku*) for fish-fat and intoxicants" (Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār, *Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai* 214 ff.). In another poem, honey was mixed with rice flakes (Tāyaṅkaṇṇaṉār, *Akam* 237, c. A.D. 180), and it also provided the basis for the production of a fermented intoxicating drink.[10] The mixture of honey and milk was considered to be particularly excellent. Every student of Tamil literature remembers couplet 1121 from the famous *Tirukkuṟaḷ* of Tiruvaḷḷuvar (c. A.D. 450):

> The water which oozes from the shining teeth
> of the soft speech sweetheart
> is like a mixture of honey with milk.

Irula honey gathering is surrounded by strict taboos. It is imperative that men who engage in honey gathering are prepared for their task by abstaining from sexual encounters. They should not even talk to women; they should not sleep on their (polluted) mats the night before the expedition but on freshly washed cloth. The ladder used to climb rocks while honey is being collected (called *mālu*) must not be touched by women. The honey gatherers should be filled with awe and devotion (*bhakti*). This shows that honey-gathering is supposed to be, among Irula-speaking tribes, not only an economically motivated occupation but also one that has gained the status of ritualized activity, probably because of its antiquity and the dangers connected with it. This fact is also reflected in the relation of honey and honey gathering to the gods and to mythological/ancestral heroes.

Bees (*kunni, künni*) — a word that seems to be limited to the languages of the Nilgiri area[11] — are also the source of bees-wax (*mëkku*), which the Irulas collect as well.

An important part of Irula diet is obtained by gathering various mushrooms (*këa, kuga*), edible (*tiṅgilā*; literally, may be eaten) as opposed to poisonous (*nanjukuga, väcakuga, puccu-koṇḍaka*). The most favorite edible mushrooms are the *kūnu* (thin legs, small umbrella-like shape, grows in large quantities in the rainy season) and the *koṇḍaka* or *koṇḍakuga* (cf. Ālu Kuṟumba *koṇḍakūnu*; white or whitish color, large, umbrella-shaped when 'ripe,' growing on stumps of old trees and deserted ant hills). It is said to be very tasty, though I admit I was afraid to try it. Certain mushrooms are also used in magic, e.g., the *Phallus impudicus* (Ālu Kuṟumba *olevukūnu* 'menstruation mushroom').

Apart from edibles, the Irulas have always collected such forest produce as gums, dyes, and tree bark. Keys (1812) remarked that Irulas were expert in collecting honey and wax from rocks and cliffs; and subsequent reports by Shortt (1869), Thurston (1909), and Lushington (1902) listed the following as the main products taken to the Madras Forest Department by the Irulas: bees-wax, deer antlers, gum, honey, avaram (*Cassia auriculata*) bark, vembadam (*Vintilago madraspatana*) bark, myrobalan fruit

(*Tamar. chebula*), tamarind fruit (*Tamar. indica*), and soapnut (*Sapindus trifoliatus*). By far the most important among these items was myrobalan fruit used for tanning — now replaced by Acacia bark and synthetic tanning agents.

Although gathering has not deteriorated as much as hunting, it is done mostly by children and old people, and it represents only minor activity among the Irulas — with the exception of dry-season gathering of tubers and wet-season gathering of mushrooms. With the onset of the younger generation, the gathering skills and the knowledge of edible roots, plants, medicinal herbs, and mushrooms are disappearing along with the unique honey-collecting skill. Most collected produce is now used by the Irulas themselves, and almost none is bartered or sold.

A few words have to be said about trade and handicrafts. Traders from the plains almost inevitably exploit and cheat the tribesmen. It is distressing to hear Todas, Kotas, Kuṛumbas, and Irulas complaining about the merciless exploitation and cheating that they have to suffer at the greedy hands of Tamil Chettiars, North Indian Jaina Marwaris and Gujaratis, and other trading castes and communities from the plains. A tribesman's attitude is anything but businesslike: he usually prefers to act as a generous kinsman or friend rather than as a shrewd trader intent only on personal profit.

Irula tribesmen do not usually take to trading or to making any financial transactions. In the sphere of handicrafts, too, there is not very important activity, though there are a few exceptions, some of them quite significant. It seems that traditionally Irulas have never manufactured objects from metal or earthenware — perhaps they were even implicitly 'prohibited' from doing so. These things were always obtained by barter from the Kotas and later from the Badagas and the plainspeople. Nowadays they are bought.

"In old days," I was told, "Irulas brought from the outside world only salt and ironheads for their spears." Everything else was made by them. After some discussion with several informants, I put together the following list of items that were manufactured locally by the Irulas, some of which still are today: musical instruments — i.e., the bamboo-flute (*bugari*) and the wooden clarinet (*koála*) — with the exception of drums, which were once made from hollow wood but today are imported; sticks and canes (*vëṭṭutaḍi, prambu*); baskets (*gūḍe*) and winnowing baskets (*moṛa*); mats (*pāyi*) from bamboo (*mūṅgil*); broomsticks (*mārukëṭṭu*); wooden chairs (*kaṭṭil*) and wooden boxes (*pëṭṭi*); traps, nets, and slings for hunting; wooden parts of guns; wooden mortars (*rallu*) and pestles (*lakke*); all materials necessary for building houses of the traditional type (*kūre*); fire-making implements (*cakkimukku*); toys for children, e.g., bamboo carts (*mūṅgavaṇḍi*); and wax (*mëkku*) for candles. As we see, the list is quite rich, the absence of metal and earthenware notwithstanding. The fire-making implement — my best Ūrāḷi informant, Rāyappan of Gundri, still carried one set carefully wrapped in a piece of leather hidden in his lungi — consists of fire-kindling stones (*kallu*) and/or iron (*cakkimukku*), a bit of cotton (*panju*) or dry grass (*pullu*), and a few *mantras* [short magic formulas] to say for fire (*tī*) to catch.

There are five important bazaars in the immediate or near vicinity of Irula and Ūrāḷi settlements: Mettupalaiyam on the river Bhavani; Kotagiri and Aravenu up in the hills; Sholurmattam in the northwestern region; and Sattimangalam (Satyamangalam) for the Ūrāḷis. The Irulas go only rarely to the markets at Ootacamund or Coonoor.

# Notes

[1] Tamil Kūñcampaṉai, Kūñjapaṉai/Eng. Kunjapanai (some Irulas also call this village Konjamaṇe or Konjamëṇe) lies in the Mele Nāḍu territory, in what the Irulas call *nama cīmeli* or *nama nāḍili* [in our country]. It is probably appropriate to mention here that the Irulas usually call the Nilgiris Nīlamele [Blue Mountains] and that outside of the Nilgiris they distinguish between Melecīme [old Mysore State], Kī̈ecīme [lit., low country, i.e., Tamilnadu], and Vayanāḍu [territory to the west of the Nilgiris, Wynaad, and Kerala].

[2] I do not know for certain, but all evidence points to the fact that the occurrence and distribution of members of different clans in Irulas settlements is the result of various accidental factors (such as historical and traditional occupancy, proximity of livelihood, modern administrative arrangements, etc.) and not of a social structural pattern. I have not come across or heard of any village that would be inhabited by members of **all** existing *kulas*, and the patterns of clan distribution in villages are quite irregular. Thus, in Kunjapanai there live members of the Kuppä, Kalkaṭṭi, Pūṅgä, Dēvane, Cambä, Pēradä, and Koḍuvä clans. In Kolikkarai, "most people are Cambaru." In Cemmaṇaṟe, "most people are Kalkaṭṭiyaru."

[3] Irula *vē̈ṟe jādikārä uḷḷe cēttugale.*

[4] Cf. Ta. *capparam*, Ka. *cappara* (Urdu *cappar*) "canopied car-like vehicle in which idols are carried; howdah."

[5] Cf. Kota *aṭṭ* [loft, attic], Toda *oṭm* [place for firewood made of cords tied from side rafters to roof], Ālu Kuṟumba *aṭṭálu* 'erhöhtes mehr oder weniger breites Lehmsims oder erhöht angebrachtes Bambusregal (dient in Küchenraum zur Aufbewahrung von Gefässen und Nahrungsmitteln).'

[6] Cf. Kota *vaṇm* (sari; Toda *poṇ* 'colored cloth with dots'/Ka. *baṇṇa* 'color, dress.' Sanskrit *varṇa*-/Prakrit *vaṇṇa*- 'color').

[7] Cf. Ta. *kaṅkaṇam*, Madurai Saurāṣṭra *kayno*, Tirup. Saur. *kagana* (Turner s.v. 2597). I am grateful for this suggestion from my colleague Dr. Norihiko Uchida (Kyoto).

[8] Cf. Tamil *vēṭṭam, vēṭṭai* 'hunting, chase'; Kota *vēṭ*; Toda *pēṭ*; Kannaḍa *bēṭe, bēṇṭe*; Tulu *bōṇṭè, bēṇṭè*, etc.

[9] Cf. Ālu Kuṟumba *bē̈ṇḍu.*

[10] In about A.D. 200, *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* (115) spoke of *tēmpiḻitēṟal* 'clarified toddy extracted from honey'; *Puṟam* (115.3) mentions *tēkkaṭṭēṟal* 'clarified intoxicating toddy from honey,' etc.

[11] Cf. Ālu Kuṟumba *kúnni*, Badaga *kunni*.

# 6

## The Life Cycle

The life-crisis events of the Irulas will be described in the following order: attitudes toward love and sex; pregnancy and childbirth; name-giving; coming of age, puberty, and menstruation rites; marriage; and death, burial, and eschatology. These happenings in the life of an individual Irula male or female are regarded as critical; as such, they are accompanied by the appropriate rites of passage. My data on these attitudes and events, and on the rites of passage, are far from complete. It was difficult to elicit information pertaining to some of them, and I would have needed more uninterrupted time dedicated to research in the field than was at my disposal, and more means than either I or the Dutch academic institutions could afford. In spite of these shortcomings, I believe that what I have to offer will be of use to the student of Indian anthropology and of primitive and tribal societies.

The love-life of the Irulas is more intense than that of most plainspeople's communities, although it does not reach the vigor and ardor of the sexual life of the Todas. Attitudes toward sex are generally much more unrestricted and much less conventionalized than the attitudes of the Hindu plainspeople. Although marriages are nowadays frequently arranged, and the virginity of girls is highly prized, premarital sexual encounters occur frequently, free choice of sex partner is common, love accompanied by love-making occurs regularly between the sexes, and there is typically a humorous attitude regarding sex that is particularly attractive. Also, divorce and remarriage do not carry any social stigma, though these events have to be properly socially regulated. On the whole, attitudes toward love and sex are probably rather like those in the old Tamil society or similar to those prevalent in emancipated Western societies; thus, their attitudes differ drastically from those that prevail in today's Hindu India.

Sexual organs are the objects of lively interest, which is reflected in various myths. There are stories that explain the origin of the penis, the

vagina, and the clitoris. A long penis figures in a few stories (*ā kālatti* 'in those days,' penises were as long as a rope). In one story told by Bīmä, a young man, full of desire for a young woman, waits till her husband goes out hunting, approaches her house, and while she is frying millet, pushes his long erect penis through an opening in the wall to insert it into her vagina from behind. However, the woman grabs the frying rod and chops off his penis. "Only the handle remained," adds the narrator laughing with gusto, "everything else went to pieces."[1] Another story, also related by Bīmä, possibly hints at the rite of clitoridectomy, which is, however, no longer practiced. The origin of menstruation is described in the Mele Nāḍu creation myth, recounted below.

In intercourse, there is a choice of postures, but one technique is definitely favored: the woman sits with her back leaning against the wall of the hut or against a tree or rock while the man kneels before her and either lifts her thighs and places her legs on his shoulders, or inserts his penis while she spreads her legs wide apart, with knees pointing up and the soles of the feet solid against the ground.

I do not have many love songs in my data. But I was assured that those I had were current, being sung at lonely places in the forest, or while the girl is grazing goats or going alone to fetch water from the stream. Both boys and girls sing love songs. P. Sivaraj sang one for me in 1981:

> Is there water in Madure river?
> Come gently, come.
> We'll place a pipe and draw it.
> La le laa lee la lee lalelaa.
> Gently, my dear.
> Together we'll play
> and make a baby out of the black jack-fruit.
> Gently, my dear.
> If a boy is born, we'll name him Laccuma.
> If a girl is born, Laccumi.
> Gently, my dear.

Another love song in my records is more daring:

> He was thin and small,
> but his penis was as big as a pumpkin.
> He just touched my door,
> and I shivered all over my body.

In Irula, a pregnant woman is called *vōṟu pöṇḍu* [literally, belly woman], and to be pregnant is described as *vōṟāyi* 'to become belly.' A pregnant woman bathes as frequently as two or three times per week, in water mixed with turmeric powder (*cīgekāyi, Acacia concinna*), the bark of the *ulume* tree (*ulumepaṭṭe*), and green powder (*ūnjacoppu*). For about one month before delivery, she will not eat meat but will be served a strictly vegetarian diet.

For three days after delivery, she will be fed a mixture of baked leaves of *cīge* (*Acacia concinna*), pepper, and salt, considered a powerful native medicine. For three months after delivery, the young mother and her child are usually kept in a specially constructed hut in order to be protected from infection, sexual abuse, and strenuous work.

The name-giving ceremony (*pēr väkkadu, pēr iḍugudu*), usually called *titu*, is performed on the eighth day after the child is born. The day is called *pēr väkka nāḷu*. Names are traditionally given so that the first son gets the name of the paternal grandfather, the second son that of the maternal grandfather, the first daughter that of the paternal grandmother, and the second daughter that of the maternal grandmother. This pattern is very similar to the custom of some Hindu castes. If there are more children, they are given names after paternal and maternal uncles and aunts. Thus, P. Sivaraj is the son of S. Pulaiyan: the P. in front of his name stands for his father's name, and Sivaraj was his grandfather's name. P. Sivaraj will name his first-born son S. Pulaiyan, like his father. There is a vague idea of rebirth behind this custom, but this seems to be rather recent; perhaps it instead indicates the closely knit unit of lineage. A name may have an extended form that contains the name of the clan, the place of origin, and eventually the occupation as well: Kūnjapeṇe Masaṇa Mēstiri, where Kūnjapeṇe refers to the village of Kunjapanai, Masaṇa is the proper name of the person, and Mēstiri refers to his former occupation of a plantation overseer. A person of this name was one of my best informants; with great pleasure and oratorical skill, he told several excellent stories, recounted below.

Endearment names exist in plenty. Parents, especially mothers and grandmothers, will use endearment names like Ponnä for boys and Ponni for girls (both derived from *pon* 'gold'), instead of calling children of both sexes by their own names. Thus my informant Sivaraj's younger sister's name is Laccumi, but her mother will say *Ponni idi vā* "Come here, darling."

The three most complicated rites of passage are those that accompany menstruation's onset, marriage, and death. The marriage and death ceremonies are highly complex and structured.

The coming of age of a girl (*nëṛe*)[2] is the most important event in her life. It involves not only a series of rituals connected with the necessary purification and celebrations, termed collectively *nëṛe abba* 'maturity feast,' but also secondary rites such as piercing the ears (and presenting earrings); piercing the nose (and presenting nose-jewels); and presenting new bangles, anklets, and diferently styled garments.

Previously it was a custom that at first menstruation, the girl was isolated for fifteen days: for seven days in the menstruation hut and for the next eight days with her family — but still isolated — washing her own clothes, cooking for herself, handling her own dishes, and so on. Nowadays she stays for eight days in the menstruation hut, termed *kuḍil* [small hut], *cāley* [hut], or *tanikūre* [solitary house], which is the most frequently employed term. Not far removed in the jungle, but in the immediate vicinity of the village, the *tanikūre* is often part of other similar huts, of an entire 'menstruation complex.' For the eight isolation days the girl eats only fruits (such as jack, guava, bananas), which are brought to the hut by her mother or sister(s), not by any male relatives. Blood in any form is dangerous and polluting, and menstrual blood doubly so — especially for men. However, it is also considered the source of life, since it is believed that it is also 'seed': it is the red 'seed' of woman, and it must be mixed with the white semen of man to create a child.

In subsequent periods, a menstruating woman stays in the *tanikūre* for five days. She does not touch men or communicate with them, nor does she cook, touch food, handle dishes, have sex, or enter any house at all.

However, she may be brought food by anyone, including her husband. Women usually enjoy their stay in *tanikūre*. In larger settlements, like Garkiyur, there are at least four to five menstruation huts, and there are always a few women enjoying leisure time, doing nothing but talking and being cared for.

The Irulas have a lovely little story that they tell to girls who are about to mature or who have just reached puberty. P. Sivaraj told me the story, which also shows the sensitivity and tenderness of the tribal people in such matters, and their close contact with nature.

"There was a girl in our community," narrated my informant,

> She was called Pāli. She was a small girl, and one day someone told her, "This you will understand only when you bloom and mature." Pāli did not at all understand what had been said. Bloom? Mature? She was thinking and thinking, and then she saw a few shining blossoms on a small jasmine bush. The flowers asked her why she was so thoughtful and sad. When she answered that she did not understand how she could "bloom," the blossoms smiled and said, "Look at us. We were born from this plant, our mother, from very small buds; we were growing and growing, and one day we bloomed into our present beauty. Just like that, you're growing and growing, and one day you'll suddenly open and bloom into your proper shape and beauty." Pāli was less sad now, but still she did not understand. Then she saw a pomegranate tree. It had large ripe fruits. When the tree saw Pāli, it told her to pluck one fruit and open it. As she did, red juice spurted from the fruit, and the tree said, "Just like this, one day you'll be ripe, and red juice will spurt out of your body." Pāli was even less sad and thoughtful because the fruit was juicy and tasty, but she still did not quite understand. She came home and worked in the kitchen. While preparing food she cut open a ripe red tomato. The juice stained her fingers, and the tomato said, "I am all ripe and ready to be eaten. One day you, too, will be quite ripe and full of red juice." At that moment, Pāli felt pain in her lower belly, and blood came spurting out of her body. She at once remembered the blossoms of jasmine and the pomegranate fruit, looked at the tomato, and understood that now she was completely ripe and beautiful and ready to be taken.

Boy's ears are pierced, too, and small earrings (*kaduku*) are inserted in them at the age of seven or eight years. Later the boy (and the man) can

wear them, or not. After piercing the ears, the boy is considered grown up; but it is not a proper coming-of-age ceremony, for there is no initiation ceremony for boys. From the age of four to six, every boy will wear a *ḍokanni*. This is a cord wrapped snugly around the waist and tightly covering the boy's pudenda with a small piece of attached cloth. If boy is sick, his *ḍokanni* is thrown away toward the end of the illness; this is believed to remove the disease. Old people believe in protective (*kāppu*) bracelets called *kakkaṇa* and also in protective earrings (*kādukallu*) for both men and women.

The Irula family is patrilineal and patrilocal, strictly speaking. After marriage, the female comes to live in the husband's village. However, there is quite a bit that must happen before they reach that goal. A girl before marriage should remain a virgin (*kanni*). Virginity (*kannime*) is a virtue and is considered important, though premarital sex is not rare, particularly between a boy and a girl who are socially destined to be married. A *ḷamme*[3] is a very young girl who has "not ripened" (*pëṯṯele*) and who is almost automatically supposed to be a virgin. She is also referred to as *ḷammeme*[4] or *pinjukkayi*, literally, 'young, tender, unripe fruit.' When puberty usually occurs, between fourteen and sixteen years of age, the girl should be married off as soon as possible. However, if a girl is not a virgin, no social stigma will attach to her, and she will still be marriageable.

Suitable bridegrooms are found among boys belonging to clans of unrestricted marriage-ties. The first step is taken by the boy's parents; this is termed *pöṇṇu pōy kĕ̄kkaṇo*, the necessity of going and asking for the girl in marriage. This takes place about a month before the actual wedding. The bridegroom's people (i.e., his parents, possibly brothers or sisters and other relatives, and the *jātti*, or representative of his clan) go to the girl's village on an auspicious day. In a conventionalized conversation, they offer help with gardening, field work, and other activities to the girl's family. Along with a basket of gifts, they leave behind digging sticks, forks, wooden bars, iron rods, and similar instruments that they had brought.

After about a month they will return, and the first *nicciya* [discussion, council] takes place. The bridegroom's people are treated as welcome guests; on their part, they again offer help and ask for the fruits of the labors of the girl's family. They also ask, *"Pöṇṇu targiriyā*?" ["Will you give the girl?"]. The bridegroom also appears, sees the girl, and expresses his approval or disapproval.

The next day, or after a few days, the second *nicciya* takes place. The bride and the bridegroom are allowed to see each other freely, and it is hoped that they will both give their consent.[5] After the *nicciya* or *nāya* is finished, the actual wedding day (*maduvenāḷu*) is fixed. From that moment on, the most important person will be the *jātti*, the clan representative. The fixing of the wedding day also involves the discussion about financial arrangements (there is no dowry; instead the bridegroom pays a small amount of a few rupees to the bride's family). The wedding booth is made from different materials, but it must contain twelve branches of the *pāla* (alias *āli* 'milk tree') tied to the two front parts of the booth.

On the wedding day, when the actual wedding is performed (*maduve māḍu*), the *jāttiṣ*, relatives, and elders gather in the bridegroom's house, and after feeding the *jātti* of the bridegroom and his wife, a wedding procession is formed, which then goes to the bride's house. The bride, who has been bathed and adorned on the previous day, is already waiting. Her people will take seven vessels (*ōḷu cembu*) and fill them with water mixed with

chili powder and pepper. As soon as the bridegroom and his party arrive, they sip from each of the vessels a little of this water, called *karenīru.*

The *jāttis* lead the ceremonies, which consist of reciting certain sayings and partaking of a ceremonious feast, usually of chicken curry. The eating ritual is exactly structured; even the various parts of the chicken are strictly apportioned. Following the feast, mats are spread in front of the bride's house, and the girl's *jātti* receives the vessels and clothes brought by the boy's *jātti.*

Now follows the most important rite of the first wedding day. The brides' *jātti* takes a brass vessel, places it in the center, takes the betel brought by the boy's people, and mixes it with the betel of the bride's family. He then divides it into seven parts and places these around the brass vessel. In their midst he places a stone. The boy's *jātti* then puts 60¼ rupees (in one-rupee coins) upon the stone, counts three times, and places the money into the vessel. While he counts, a traditional wedding song is sung, and the bridegroom's *jātti* gives the vessel, with the money, to the bride's *jātti.* This is the song:

I went in front, I went behind,
I came tired and yielding,
I came crawling like a frog,
I came, having ground into flour the millet of
the fields,
I came, having cut the kikuyu grass in the
paddy field,
I came, having cut the thorns of the
*koṭṭacīṅge,*
I came, having cut the thorns of the *uricīṅge,*
giving into the palm of the hand the whole
earth,
giving the woman taking her by the elbow,
O you who have the woman as your
daughter.
As the open house has been opened,
as the lighted lamp has been lighted,
as the boiled rice has been boiled,
as the spread-out mat has been spread out,
as the cutting knife was cutting,
has your sitting and my sitting joined and
combined?
It hasn't been joined, it hasn't been joined, it
hasn't been joined.
It has joined!

Until the word *cēṇḍadō* "has joined?" the song is sung by the boy's *jātti,* whereupon the girl's *jātti* 'denies' the union by saying "it hasn't been joined" three times but then affirms the marriage alliance by shouting *cēṇḍuṭṭadu* "it has joined."

On the second wedding day, the next morning, the bride is dressed in the clothes brought by the boy's party and adorned with jewels given by the bridegroom. The boy's *jātti* gives a small amount of money (termed *moleyaḍipaṇa* 'breast-striking money') to the bride's mother for having suckled the bride while she was a baby. The bride and bridegroom are

seated together, and the bridegroom ties the *tāli* [marriage necklace] around the bride's neck, though it seems that previously it was tied by the boy's *jātti's* wife. All the gathered Irulas fall on their knees and pay homage to the new couple. Next the maternal uncle of the bride blesses the couple, and then the newlyweds spread new cloth and prostrate themselves before their parents.

The last part of the ceremony is called *poṇṇuk' oṇḍume teriyādu* [the girl knows nothing]. The bride's *jātti* says these words and adds that the bride doesn't know how to cook, how to wash, how to fetch water, how to go to the forest and gather firewood, and so on. You must teach her everything. Please don't drive her away because of her ignorance. The bridegroom's *jātti* answers, "I'll take good care of your girl."

Then the bride and the bridegroom, assisted respectively by a young woman and a young man and followed by the relatives and the *jāttis*, set out for the boy's village. When they arrive, the bride must enter her new home with her right foot first. Incense is burned, the newlyweds are blessed, and a feast follows. The bride, joined by her husband's *jātti's* wife, prepares rice brought from her house, and then the rice is placed on a single plantain leaf from which the newlyweds eat, feeding each other. The feast continues with singing and dancing until night falls. Consummation of the marriage takes place on this the second wedding night.

The story of the marriage of my informant, P. Sivaraj, is untypical because he studied in the Government Tribal Residential School at Coonoor, became a warden in a boy's hostel there, and finally became a teacher of Irula children in Kunjapanai. This is his authentic version of how he married his wife:

P.S.: My father and mother saw the girl first. I myself have never before seen her. Mother and Father told me one day last year, "Next week you're going to be married." Usually the boy may go one or two weeks before the wedding to see the girl. But if I would have said I don't want the girl, they would have looked somewhere else. If she would have said I don't like him, it would mean that she already had someone else in mind. It would mean that she loves someone else.

K.Z.: So the girl, too, has the right to say no?

P.S.: Yes, yes.

K.Z.: But you liked what you saw. You liked your wife.

P.S.: (Giggle) Yes, yes.

K.Z.: How old is your wife?

P.S.: Sixteen or seventeen, I think. Very young. I can marry all girls except my own *kula* or from the Pērade clan. That would be like marrying my own sister. That would be a *tappu*, a fault, a *karma*, sin. After marriage, my wife came to live in my house in Kūnjapeṇe. I would never go to live in my

wife's place, which is Cemmaṇaṟe. That is not done. I go only to visit her parents. When we have children, they will be of my *kula*, Kuppe. I married late; I'm almost twenty-seven. Because I went to school.

K.Z.: How come that you studied? How did it happen?

P.S.: I had average marks, but in Kūnjapeṇe I was first rank. So I went to study at Coonoor. My father and mother liked it.

K.Z.: Does your wife know Tamil?

P.S.: Yes, she knows Tamil and Badaga.

K.Z.: English?

P.S.: (Giggle, giggle) No English.

K.Z.: And now you have a job as teacher in the Kūnjapeṇe school.

P.S.: Yes, yes. There is one Irula teacher, me. And Damodaran, a Tamil teacher. And Selvam, a lady-teacher, Tamil; and Jeynah, a Tamil Christian teacher. And Madan, a Badaga teacher. There are two hundred and thirty children. There are one hundred and fifty houses in Kūnjapeṇe.

K.Z.: Do you love your wife?

P.S.: (Giggle, giggle, giggle, giggle) Oh — I like her very much, very much. She's pretty.

Traditionally, there were several different types of marriage-arrangements possible. The most common type is the arranged marriage, just as with the Hindu plainspeople of the villages. However, it also was — and still is — common that the young man finds on his own a young woman for himself (naturally in agreement with the restrictive clan-rules of exogamy), enters into sexual relations before marriage, stays in the woman's house, lives with her for some time, and only then marries her. The Irula term for a man living with the woman in her house before marriage is *moṇa māppiḷe*. During the period he lives with the woman, he gives his earnings to her parents. He is free to leave before marriage. If, in such an arrangement, the man works in the woman's house and on the fields and gardens of her family, the arrangement is called 'marriage by service.'

Previously, marriage by elopement was also quite common: a man ran away with the woman or caught a woman and brought her to his house more or less by force. In such a case, if the woman became pregnant, regular marriage was arranged at once.

The attitude toward dying and death is rather matter-of-fact, without any taboo attached to it. The Irulas do not mind speaking about dying, corpses, funerals. I was assured repeatedly, and with laughter, *ade patti nōgad'oṇḍum ille* [there's nothing painful about it] and *ade patti dukka ille* [there's no sorrow attached to it].

Old people are usually treated with respect and tenderness. When a person becomes old, he or she is always taken care of by his or her sons or daughters, or by both. And when a person dies, a complex series of rites accompanies his or her interment, so that, in agreement with the customs of the tribe and clan, the spirit of the dead person is free to enter its clearcut post-mortem existence.

First, in front of the house of the deceased, a special structure is built in the form of a peculiar hut, called *guḍra* or *guḍikëṭṭu*. It consists of a bier on which the body lies and a high superstructure made of sticks, clothes (*vaṇṇa*), an umbrella, and a small brass vessel (*cembu*) placed on top. The women of the family take off some of their jewelry and place it with the corpse, which also receives new clothes and flowers. There is some wailing, but there is much more dancing, drumming, and music, more in the spirit of merry-making than of mourning.

Every clan or clan lineage has its own *koppe* or 'memorial hut.' Thus, at the Kūnjapeṇe burial ground that I visited, there were four *koppes* for four different *kulas*. A man's wife and children share his *koppe*. The hut (also termed 'the shrine of the dead,' which sounds grander) is situated on the burial place (*koppe ūru*) in the forest, which is usually in walking distance from an Irula settlement. Graves (*kuyi*) are relatively shallow pits marked, if at all, by low mounds.

Like all Indians, the Irulas believe in rebirth, albeit rather vaguely. Rebirth (*mäṟupiṟavi*) is a means of settling moral debts: e.g., if one was a closefisted miser in life, one would probably be reborn as a poor, destitute person, and if a husband and wife were living very happily together, they may again be born as lovers. However, first every deceased person becomes a *gōḷu* [ghost]. Therefore, it is necessary to perform the ceremony of *cīru,* which ensures that the *gōḷu* is either reborn or goes to paradise (*mēlōga*) or to hell (*kīlōga*). The central rite of this ceremony, and the most important ritual connected with death, is the 'placing of the stone' (*kallu väkkoṇo*), which sets the spirit of the deceased to rest.

There is no fixed time for observing this ritual. Since it is a costly affair (the ritual is accompanied by a communal feast), it depends upon the availability of funds. It is done as early as possible after death, otherwise the ghost, the *gōḷu*, may cause harm; but it may take place as long as half a year after the death.

The eldest son of the deceased is the officiant. He wears a new dress (a long *baṭṭe*) over his shoulders; a *dīpa* [lamp] filled with castor oil is lit. The chief mourner, accompanied by the representatives of all *kulas*, goes to the cemetery, carrying the memorial stone (a round stone — large for grown-ups, smaller for children, very large for important persons — smoothed by water from a nearby stream) to the *kallugoppe* of his lineage or clan. Food (*rāgi* balls, rice, chicken curry, etc.) prepared at home is carried along. The stone is placed in the *koppe* along with the stones of dead ancestors, and all memorial stones are sprinkled with oil. With the stone, some food articles are taken in and placed on a leaf and in a pot or cup. After the *pūjā,* — which is performed, if possible, by the eldest son of the deceased — dead ancestors are worshipped. The ritual feast follows in the cemetery: first, the meal is consumed by the chief mourner, his family, and the representatives of other clans; then the food is distributed to all people present.

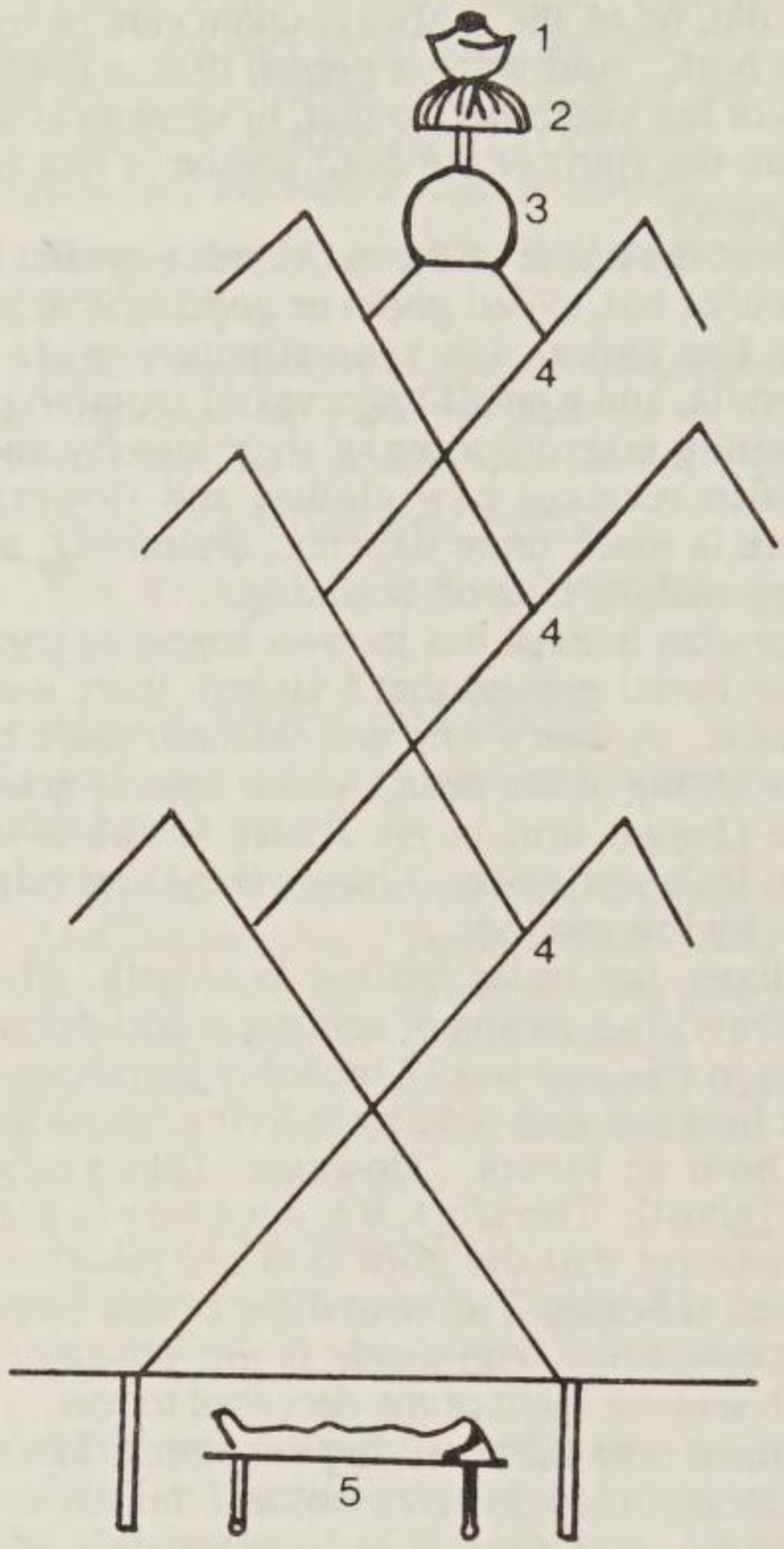



Fig. 23: *Guḍra*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | brass vessel (*cembu*) | 4 | stick and cloth construction |
| 2 | umbrella (*koḍe*) | | |
| 3 | offerings (*pulikkūṭṭu*) | 5 | corpse |

Fig. 24: Memorial temple (*koppe*) in Kūnjapeṇe

Fig. 25: Irulas dancing during a funeral, Kōyikere (1978)

Apart from the life-cycle ceremonies, the two most important *abbas* [ceremonial feasts] of the Irulas are those performed on Rangaswami Peak and the *kāremëḍe tēru*, the chariot-festival in the temple at Kāraimaḍai. This temple lies in the plains of the Coimbatore district and is a somewhat weird but very interesting place: a Vaishnava Brahmin temple today, it shows unmistakable vestiges of tribal Irula worship.

Through a lovely corridor with teak pillars and teak carvings, one enters the temple accompanied by eager Shri Vaishnava Iyengar Brahmin priests, and lo, in the *garbhagṛha* [the inner sanctum] one faces a *svayambhū* or 'self-originated' Raṅganātha: a typical black Irula stone (*kallu*) with a 'scar.' A cowherd (of the Iṭaiya caste) was grazing his cows but noticed that from one cow he could not extract the proper quantity of milk. Also, the strange animal tended to disappear every day for some time. The cowherd followed her and found out that the cow was milking herself over a deserted ant hill (*puṛṛu*) standing under a *kāraimaram* tree. Enraged, the cowherd slashed at the stone with his machete but, to his horror, saw the stone bleed! In his dream, god Raṅganātha appeared to him and asked to be worshipped under that particular form on that particular spot. The original petrified ant hill with the 'scar' became the center around which the Kāraimaḍai temple was built. Thus, the local legend.[6]

In the compound of the temple stands the original *kārai* tree with a statue of Raṅganātha (the original stone was transplanted into the *garbhagṛha*). The *devī,* the *śakti* of Raṅganātha, one of the god's two consorts and the more important one of the two, is called Raṅgammāboṭṭu — that is, Raṅga-Mother-Mountain, identified specifically by one of the priests as Rangaswami Peak. I was told — or rather, it was admitted — that in this shrine there were originally Irula *pūjāris* who were replaced by Vaishnava Brahmins. Also, once a year, among the thousands of pilgrims who come to the annual festival, there are the Irulas in large numbers, both Vëṭṭe Kāḍus and Mele Nāḍus. I was told that they place on the *taṭṭu* [plate] 1 ¼ Rs. as the usual offering. This seemed to be a very important fact to be mentioned by the Brahmin priests.

# Notes

[1] Cf. a strikingly similar story in W. G. Archer, *The Hill of the Flutes, A Portrait of the Santals* (London, 1974):225.

[2] *Nëṛe* is both noun and verb. It means physical (sexual) maturity, *nëṛendukudu* (verb) "maturity has occurred," *nëṛendaḷiyō* "are you mature?" — i.e., "have you had your (first) menses?"

[3] Obviously connected with the Dravidian root **iḷ-a-*, cf. Tamil *iḷamai* 'youth, young, tender.' The term *ḷamme* is also used in reference to plants, trees, and animals, cf. *ḷamme mara* 'young tree,' *ḷamme kunni* 'larvae of bees,' *ḷamme nāṭṭu* 'tender young shoots'; cf. also *ḷamme bennu*, which refers either to the virginal body of an unmarried girl or to the body of a newly married woman carrying her first child.

[4] To be analyzed as **iḷamai-y-ammai* 'young female.'

[5] They may also refuse. If the boy vehemently dislikes the girl, he may say no, and the whole procedure simply starts again in some other place. Even the girl may refuse. I was assured by P. Sivaraj that no sanctions follow a negative outcome or refusal. If a girl refuses to marry in an arranged marriage, it is usually taken as a sign that she loves some other boy (they may even have a secret affair), and if there are no clan restrictions and other obstacles, they will ultimately marry.

[6] This legend is a stereotype repeated innumerably to legitimize worship of *svayambhū* idol (stone, tree stump, ant hill, etc.). It is always discovered that the cow milks herself over the object that often becomes the aim of attack, bleeds, and finally becomes the idol to be worshipped by subsequent generations.

# 7

## Irula Language and Verbal Art

As stressed by Emeneau, the Nilgiri communities are in many respects unique in India; they are also unique linguistically in that they carry to the extreme the tendency to insist on their linguistic differences as symbols of intracommunity solidarity and for the purpose of mutual differentiation. Most of the tribal languages of the area are mutually unintelligible, although they are spoken often by very small populations. Thus, according to Emeneau, the three "most conspicuous communities" — Toda, Kota, and Badaga — speak three mutually unintelligible languages, though all of them are classified as South Dravidian. Toda is in many respects a language very much *sui generis*, although it is closely related to Kota; their nearest relatives are Tamil and Malayalam, but they must have split off from pre-Tamil many centuries ago, probably two thousand years ago or earlier.

The very complex and numerous phonological innovations in Toda were responsible for the Kota-Toda split. Let's take as illustrations the words for "bull" and "(female) buffalo." The first item, Tamil *erutu,* developed into Kota *et* and Toda *ešt;* the second word, Tamil *erumai,* developed in Kota into *im*, Toda *ïr.* Badaga is obviously closely related to Kannaḍa, to such an extent that it may probably be classified as a Kannaḍa dialect. In fact, according to Hockings, Badaga and the Kannaḍa of Mysore area are, "with some effort, mutually intelligible" (1980:11). Ālu/Pālu Kuṟumba and Irula are only partly intelligible; Muḍuga and Kuṟumba are mutually intelligible with difficulty; Irula vis-à-vis Toda, Kota, and Badaga is unintelligible. The same is true about Kuṟumba. Shōlega and Irula are mutually unintelligible. As far as I can say, only Irula and Muḍuga are close enough to be mutually intelligible, and Paṇiyan and Irula may be intelligible with difficulty.

On the other communities (Jēnu Kuṟumbas, Muḷḷu Kuṟumbas, Ūrāḷi Kuṟumbas, Bëṭṭa Kuṟumbas, Wynaad Chettis, and Mauntadan Chettis) we have too little data to be able to offer even a guess. What a situation! In

addition we must realize that the Nilgiri region is what has been called a 'linguistic area' (Emeneau), and a 'convergence area,' 'diffusion area,' or 'microarea' (Diffloth, Zvelebil).[1] Emeneau has lately proposed the term 'multilingual convergence area,' which is somewhat heavy but rather precise: diffusion and borrowing of linguistic traits is frequent and must be taken into consideration almost as seriously as genetic-historical relationships and developments.

Naturally the question arises as to what language — or languages — these numerous communities use in their economic and social interaction. An anonymous author in 1819 described with charm the following situation:

> The language of the Bergies is a dialect of the Canarese; that of the Todevies and Koties is supposed to be dialect of the Tamil; but it is a singular fact that the Todevies cannot speak the language of the Koties, or the Koties that of the Todevies, and that the language of both these classes is equally unintelligible to the Bergies. (Emeneau n.d.:1)

This is a complex problem, but in the more recent aboriginal times — before the massive penetration of the Tamils and the Tamil administration into the hills and before the opening of the Nilgiris to English — Badaga, the language of the most numerous and expansive indigenous community,[2] became the second language of the bilinguals in probably all the rest of the Nilgiri ethnic groups. For the Irulas, too, Badaga is the *lingua franca* of the mountains; even in those (nowadays rare) cases of old Irulas who have difficulty with Tamil or Kannaḍa, they understand Badaga (as I know well from my fieldwork when my local assistant J. D. Rajiah took recourse to Badaga when all other attempts failed).[3]

The Irula language (*ërḷa nāya*) is an unwritten independent South Dravidian language of the Tamil-Malayalam sub-group. In 1955, I was the first to recognize its independent status, which later was emphasized in 1968 and again in 1971 and 1973. Before that, it was traditionally denied or put to doubt, and Irula even had the sad distinction of being described as a mongrel or 'bastard' language, a 'crude' or 'corrupt' mixture of Tamil and Kannaḍa.

Whether a speech form is an independent language or a dialect of another language remains, of course, always a moot point. The two categories are not 'purely,' exclusively linguistic, nor are the criteria to distinguish them. The distinction between dialects and languages is only a matter of degree, and the only safe test is, perhaps, mutual intelligibility. If so, then Irula and Tamil are indeed two different languages. But, I am afraid, the matter is not as simple as that. Take, for example, two 'peripheral' dialects of German: the German spoken in Bremen, and the German of some Swiss cantons or of Alsace; they are mutually unintelligible, and yet we do not consider them two languages. In contrast, Czech and Slovak are mutually, fully intelligible on their ordinary levels; and yet we do regard them as two languages — more on cultural, political, historical, and psychological criteria than on purely linguistic ones.

And yet, in 1973, I asked myself again whether Irula was indeed an independent tribal language or a dialect of Tamil; later, between my 1976 and 1981 field trips, I tried to solve this problem once and for all by

applying objective criteria of linguistics in a relatively rigid and precise method. Now, after these four field trips, thorough work on Irula grammar and lexicon, and the publication of two grammars of Irula and Kasaba by two other authors, I am convinced more than ever that Irula is indeed a separate preliterate language, a close relative of Tamil, with some strikingly archaic features and a few important innovations.[4]

It seems — but this, I must warn, is a very tentative hypothesis — that a pre-Dravidian (?) Melanid population that forms the bulk of the Irulas anthropologically, adopted (or perhaps was 'forced' to adopt) an ancient pre- or proto-Tamil dialect, which was superimposed almost totally on their native (pre-Dravidian?) speech. This 'new' speech-form then became the basis of the Irula language, which must have subsequently been in close contact with (and hence influenced by) the other tribal languages of the Nilgiri area as well as with the large surrounding languages such as Kannaḍa, Tamil, and Malayalam. The historical development of Irula may be symbolized by a stemma (cf. Fig. 26) that depicts the relationships among different stages and varieties of Tamil, Malayalam, and Irula.

The linguistic fact that Irula is an independent South Dravidian language certainly does not in any way diminish the apologetic, shy attitude, full of inferiority complexes, that all Irulas have toward their own language (in marked contrast to the Todas, for example). The pressure and prestige of the large contact languages, and even of Badaga, is so great that Irulas tend to switch over to one of these prestigious tongues whenever they consider it necessary, advantageous, or 'elegant.' I often had to say again and again when speaking to a group of Irulas *pāya nāyatti manevi* "speak in the old language," stressing the "old" (*pāya*), meaning Irula.

The shy, deprecatory attitude (fortunately changing at least to some extent today — although, I am afraid, it is too late!) considerably influenced my linguistic and cultural work. To sift what was genuinely Irula from what was acquired was no small matter. Since this is no technical linguistic treatise, I shall abstain from tedious details; however, I feel compelled to quote a few instances as a matter of illustration.

I became rather obsessed in my search for two kinds of phenomena: lexical substratum features and grammatical (morphosyntactic) retentions (ancient features lost in other South Dravidian tongues) or deep and striking innovations (new and unique grammatical developments). Inevitably, one is vulnerable in such an undertaking, unless one is very careful. Nevertheless, I am very grateful to those scholars who in their personal (or public and printed) comments have pointed out some errors that I had committed in my zealous search for substratum words. Thus, for example, my friend and colleague the Japanese scholar Norihiko Uchida (once at Heidelberg, now at Kyoto) pointed out to me that a word that I considered as having no etymology — namely, Irula *kakkaṇa* [wrist bangle] — must be connected with Tamil *kaṅkaṇam*, Madurai Saurashtra *kayno*, Tiru. Saur. *kagana* (Turner 1962-66, vol. 1, item 2597). Many words that looked promising as having been inherited by Irula from some lost language of the Nilgiri jungles were blown up by Emeneau, who does not generally believe in a linguistic substratum in the Nilgiri area. And yet, to this day I stick stubbornly to a few words that no one has so far 'demolished' and that may have been inherited from the language of pre-Dravidian aborigines: such as the word for 'bee' (*kunni, künni*) or the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu word for 'panther' (*ḍëkëṇe, ḍökëṇe*). Everyone has some romantic leanings and some cherished dreams — even a Dravidian linguist.

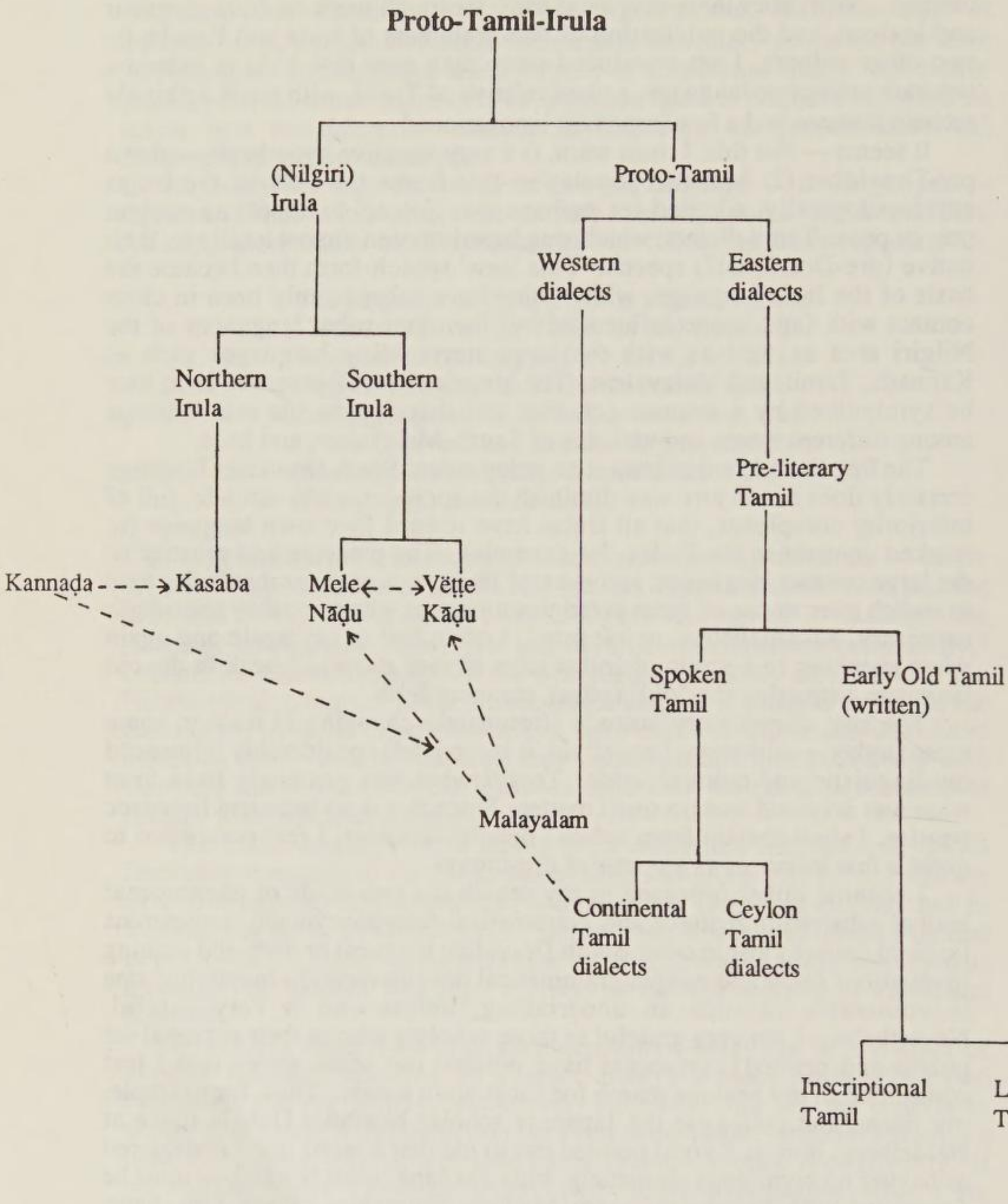



Fig. 26: Historical development of the Irula language

Safer, and in a way more interesting, are grammatical matters, though they are certainly less attractive for the general reader who is always fascinated by etymology. It was thrilling to find out, as I did during my very first visit to the Irula territory in 1968, that this backwoods nonliterary tribal speech has preserved features that were lost in Tamil 1500 years ago! The third-person plural verb suffix used with neuter (nonhuman) nouns has not been in general use in Tamil for many centuries, but an Irula will say *māḍu vargina* "the cattle comes," using a verb form that sounds very much like Old Tamil. It is as if an illiterate modern speaker of English from, say, deep down the coast of Kent were to use a verb form found in *Beowulf!* On the other hand, Irula has made innovations: Tamil has only one imperative, while Irula has three, in addition to a hortative and an optative. For instance, *tïnnu* 'eat!'; *timbi* 'why don't you eat!'; *tïnnimba* 'please eat!'; *tiṅgō* 'let's eat!'; t*ïnnudi* 'let's eat, we may eat!' What a wealth of forms in this 'primitive' tribal tongue!

Much of current linguistic work, though, can be just drudgery: eliciting answers to questions based first on hints, then on more solid knowledge, and then checking, rechecking, filing the cards, filling in the gaps in structure and vocabulary. However, when the system and structure finally emerges in all its beauty, it is an aesthetic pleasure comparable to hardly any other work. While compiling a dictionary, one also lives through many a thrilling moment, and every new word, with all its connotations and in its cultural and social contexts, shines like a precious gem. There are so many words for different kinds of forests in Irula! For different types of mountains and slopes! For colors that we do not register and classify! For kinship relationships that for us are totally irrelevant. One again and again realizes the great truth: there are no 'primitive' languages; every language that has developed 'naturally' in human society serves admirably as a means of communication (and of other functions) in that particular society. Inevitably, Humboldt's dictum comes to one's mind: *Jede Sprache ist ein Versuch.* Every language is a trial, an essay. And different linguistic communities literally inhabit and traverse different landscapes of conscious being (Steiner 1975:83). It is good to remember this at a time when the study of language is so largely dominated by a theory of dogmatic generality and synchronic abstractions.

In Irula, a well-like pool is *maḍu;* a shallow pool in a rock is *payi*; a deep pool in a rock is *pāyi*; any river is *kere*; a large river is *vā̈ni* because the largest and most popular river of the whole area is Bhavānī, Irula Vā̈ni; a small stream is *nāḷi*; a natural lake is *kē̈ru*; an artificial lake is *ēri*; a high waterfall is *uli*, but a low waterfall is *nīrvïcci*; a water tank is *kuṭṭe*, but one that is encircled by a stone embankment is *koḷa*, and so on. Only when one enters into such details of the indigenous lexicon does one feel at home in the native culture. And that is nothing compared with such linguistic discoveries as the Irulas' (like the Kuṟumbas') special words for 'the cavity at both sides of the spine of females' (*neḍigoḍalu*), or 'part of finger tip covered partly by fingernail (which is very sensitive to pain)' (*ugurukaṇṇu,* literally, 'nail eye'), or 'first sprouting of moustache on a young lad' (*vë̤ṇṇemīce,* literally, 'butter moustache') and their special verbs that say 'penis grows stiff' (*vë̤ṇekkudu*), or 'make noise of assent while listening to another person,' and so on and so forth. For a linguist, all this is utterly fascinating.

The last item in the above list — i.e., 'make noise of assent while listening' — brings me to the discussion of Irula verbal art and narration. For if there is one condition that must be fulfilled while listening to an Irula

story-teller, it is this: one must say ũ, ũ, ã̃ ũ repeatedly, otherwise the narrator starts fidgeting, becomes impatient, and finally stops talking. When one begins to tell a story he may even ask directly, *"ã̃ ũ'ndu colriya?"* "Will you say *ã̃ ũ* ? " That is, "Will you listen and 'be with me'? Then I shall tell."

I have mentioned that the investigation of the language and culture of the Irulas proceeded in the multilingual milieu — not only Irula but also Tamil, Badaga, and Kannaḍa were spoken on these occasions, especially when my local assistant, J. D. Rajiah, was there to help me. That does not mean that I did not conduct my research on my own; I did, and on many occasions in 1981 I did not use the good services of Mr. Rajiah at all. There were moments when I could talk to the Irulas directly, and these moments became more and more frequent, thanks to my growing knowledge of their tribal speech. I think I can speak Irula better than colloquial Tamil. Nevertheless, I would like to say a few words here about J. D. Rajiah and his assistance. He was a Telugu Christian (Church of England, to be sure) by origin and a retired Deputy Tahsildar. By outlook and behavior, he was very much one of the remnants of the British Raj and the Indian Civil Service; he very much belonged to a different age and a different world. His knowledge of Nilgirian matters was encyclopedic; his personal contacts with the Todas, the Badagas, the former administration — and the present administration, too — were invaluable. But, above all, there was his ever-present, broad, Pickwickian smile and his unflinching will to oblige. "That's also there, sir," he would say whenever I expressed my opinion (about anything under the sun), for his prime rule was never to contradict, even if I would contradict myself within the span of a few minutes. He always agreed with everything I said, and this of course reduced the factual value of his remarks (not to speak of judgments and opinions!) but also made him a very pleasant companion. One of his most endearing qualities was his almost childish enjoyment of a good story. He enjoyed an Irula narrative as much as I did, and he certainly understood its humor and point more and better than I could.

Irula is almost totally a preliterate society. Hence, the oral art and folklore of the Irulas has a multiple function to fulfill. While amusing and relaxing it is above all educational: songs, riddles, stories, and myths incorporate traditional wisdom and morals. Also, it validates Irula culture and justifies its rituals and institutions. Finally, together with dance and music, the narrative art promotes the Irula group-feeling of solidarity, maintains conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior, censures individuals who do not behave, converts work into play, and, of course, offers the most easily accessible and simple form of entertainment. Also, a possibly very important quality of their verbal art is that it permits the use of words and describes actions and events considered improper, taboo, and not approved in current conversation and real life. This is manifest in the 'obscene' stories of some proverbs and a few songs.

The fact that Irula creativity is expressed mainly through simple music, dance, song, and story-telling also has underlying economic and social reasons. It goes back not so long ago to the hunting-gathering way of life of their ancestors, when Irulas were, under the pressure of the 'imminence of diminishing returns,' moving from place to place in the jungle areas of the lower Nilgiris. For these people, mobility was all-important; so was portability, hence the minimum necessary equipment and the disinterest in material forms of cultural activity. Unlike the Todas who, in addition to their thrilling, highly structured bardic song-making, manifest their

creativity by vivid, lovely embroidery; unlike the Kotas who are (or were) manufacturers of tools, implements, instruments, and jewelry par excellence, the Irulas do not show any special skill in manufacturing objects typical of their material culture. In contrast, story-telling, singing, all forms of verbal art, and music and dance play a very important role in Irula life.

One typical feature of Irula story-telling is the unbridled fantasy, which is responsible for as many individual variations on one topic as there are individual narrators. In other words, there is not much formalization. Rather, a plot, a theme, a motif is taken up, and individual story-tellers modify it freely. The important exception seems to be the sacred lore, which is rather stable within the framework of each individual myth or legend. Also, it appears that stories are freely borrowed from other sources — mostly Tamil, but also Badaga and Kannaḍa, and from Kerala and Mysore — and there is, of course, a treasury of themes common to the Nīlgiri tribal communities.

Stories are usually told with gusto and relish and listened to with great attention and lively participation. I have on my tapes veritable dramatic performances of narrative art: the Ūrāḷi woman, Pāppammā, of Gundri who told her long tale of the two princesses in a shrill, loud voice with much laughter at her own use of a few lewd expressions; Masaṇa Mēstiri of Kūnjapeṇe, a gifted, genuine actor, modifying his speech from whisper to emphatic shouts of delight; Bīmä, whose memory was as stunning as that of Ārva (Cinnappa) of Gundri; Rāyappan, the Ūrāḷi orator; and many others, including even small boys.

What I could collect during my relatively short field trips was only a fragment of Irula texts that must be current in the oral tradition of the four tribal communities. In spite of this fact, certain repetitive features appeared, as did certain structural traits, trends, and tendencies. Even more striking, certain topics and themes and texts were found to agree almost completely with those noticed earlier by Thurston, Diffloth, Perialwar, and a few other scholars.

The Irulas themselves usually distinguish between two kinds of narratives: *paḷame* (literally, 'oldness, antiquity,' cf. Tamil *paḻamai*), i.e., 'old tale,' legend, myth, and *parcaṅga, percaṅga, pracaṅga* (cf. Sanskrit *prasaṅga* 'involvement'), i.e., 'narration,' any kind of story. These are in addition to riddles (*vëḍekade*) and songs. In the next chapter, I shall give instance of these genres.

# Notes

[1] The two papers that deal specifically with the Nilgiri linguistic microarea are Zvelebil 1980 and M. B. Emeneau, "The Languages of the Nilgiris," to be included in the volume on the Nilgiris edited by Paul Hockings.

[2] The character, history, and expansiveness of the Badagas has been captured well in the recent publication by Paul Hockings 1980. The term "Bergies" refers to the Badagas.

[3] However, the second language of the Irula Ūrāḷis of Biligiri-Rangana Hills is Kannaḍa, not Badaga. Many of them know Shōlega and Tamil, too. They are almost ignorant of Badaga. Some of the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas use Malayalam and, of course, Tamil, rather than Badaga, as their second language.

[4] There are at least ten specific semantic and morphosyntactic features (some of them retentions, some of them innovations) that prove beyond doubt the deep structural differences between Irula and any other language of the Tamil-Malayalam sub-group. They are enumerated and described in my third monograph on the Irula language (Wiesbaden, 1982). Also, Irula manifests a number of phonological retentions and some strikingly phonological developments, as well as lexical features (words found only in Irula or in another Nilgiri language, but not elsewhere), which show that it must be classified as an independent language of the Dravidian family. To such 'unique' words belong, e.g., *kunni, künni* 'bee'; *ōrakaṅku, ōraṅgeku, ovarakaṅku* 'tomorrow'; *(ebbu) kaṭṭe* 'conehead plant'; *koroḍu* 'cheek'; *ḍëkëṇe* 'panther'; *jāya* 'trance, divination, possession'; and *viruga* 'monitor lizard.'

# 8

# Irula Stories, Dance, and Music

The following main genres of Irula verbal art are in my data:

1. Myths and legends. They form the core of Irula narrative art, and genuine sacred lore is treated as such even today, as some events connected with their disclosure and 'revelation' indicate. They are often very complex and relatively stable; and although none of them escaped Sanskritization and Hinduization, certainly most contain ancient tribal material. Because of the absorbing interest and importance of the myths of the Nilgiri peoples, chapter ten is dedicated entirely to this genre.

2. Märchen. Many of these may be of non-Irula origin. There are certainly many motifs in them borrowed from the plainspeople. But they are nevertheless charming and are an enrichment of the fairy-tale world.

3. 'Realistic' narrative of customs. For example, accounts of honey gathering, hunting, and tuber searching, and of the myths that accompany them. These are undoubtedly genuine local lore.

4. 'Realistic' stories with a moral. I have one such typical story, told by Bīmä, which illustrates true filial love and brotherly affection. Another similar tale is a narrative about the two princesses and the idlers, told by the Ūrāḷi Pāppammā of Gundri; it is an expansion on the theme of "which house is better: the paternal home or the house of the husband?"

5. Anecdotal stories. They contain messages, and are numerous, usually brief, and quite often obscene. Favorite themes are sexual activities, illicit affairs, defecation, urination, and flatulence.

6. Animal fables. Very much favored. A very special type of the stories that present animals are those with the so-called 'echo-word' motif; another specific type deals with the origins of different animals; and yet another, with the explanations of striking animal behavior — e.g., why does the cat bury its excrement?

7. Riddles. These are great favorites. (See below.)

8. Ad hoc oratory. A magnificent example that is contained in my corpus is a speech that Rāyappan of Gundri tape-recorded as a message for his less fortunate Ūrāḷi co-tribesmen of Būdimāḍu.

A man had seven children. When another child was about to be born to the man, he told his wife, "If it is a boy, go and tie him up and kill him." For all his children were boys, and they were a poor family. When she was about to give birth, the woman left the village and went to the forest. There a boy was born. She could not bring herself to kill him; so she placed him into a kind of cradle that she made on the spot, hung it on a tree, and went away. As soon as she abandoned the child, Lord Paramaśiva and Goddess Pārvatī came that way, and Pārvatī, hearing the child's screams, said, "Let's go and see what it is about." "Eh, why should you be interested in a scream?" said the Lord. "Go and let it be, woman!" But Pārvatī went, and as soon as she saw the beautiful boy swinging his legs in the cradle, her heart mellowed and she said, "We must arrange for his livelihood." And lo, there was a small honeycomb with sweet honey (*kōlantēnu*) dripping into the child's mouth, and what's more, every night a five-rupee note appeared under its cradle. When soon after that one day the child's mother came to see her baby and saw the money, she took the child, bathed it, and brought it home. There she approached her husband's brother and said, "Brother-in-law, please hide and protect the boy." But when the husband saw the money, he agreed that they should keep the child and bring it up, and so they did. A fine boy he became, and the time came for him to be married. They found for him a girl as poor as they were, gave him a horse, and sent the two to work on the barren, dry land that belonged to them. On their way, the boy saw that the horse was limping. He took the animal to a water pond to bathe its leg, and at that moment a cloth merchant was coming that way. The boy, who had received from his mother some of the five-rupee notes found under his cradle, bought a new dress for his wife. Then a comb vendor came, and the girl got a new comb for her husband. Then, as they went on, they met a jeweler. "There's a girl coming behind," said the boy on horseback. "Put on her various jewels." Finally, he bought for his wife a sari for one hundred rupees. Such a good boy he was!

Near the field where they worked stood a house inhabited by a danseuse who made her living by stringing and selling flowers. The boy became friendly with the dancer, learned how to string flowers into various garlands and bouquets, and joined the dancing woman, somewhat neglecting his wife. The princess of that kingdom was so enchanted with the patterns of the flower garlands that she resolved to find out who was the skillful garland-maker. So she and her father took a ride. As soon as she saw the garland-making boy, she became completely infatuated with him. Secretly she had a shelter made near his field and, abandoning her honor and position, made love to him and became his sweetheart. However, there was

the wife, abandoned and furious. She decided to kill both the princess and the garland-making dancer. She got hold of the 'human root' (*āḷkaṅgu*), made an effigy from the tuber, endowed it magically with life, and then destroyed it first as a sacrifice to kill the flower girl. And indeed at the moment of the curse, the flower-selling danseuse died. However, all the others — the boy, the princess, and the king — got together and decided to destroy the witch. They killed her, and thus survived and lived well together.[1]

Immoral? From our point of view, perhaps, but not from the Indian standpoint. Polygamy is neither a sin nor a social taboo with the Irulas. The story's message is clear: the boy was good, generous, hard-working, and also shrewd. Luck and success are with the offspring who is either unwanted or seemingly unworthy (there is another very similar story in my corpus); ungratefulness and evil plotting are punished. The 'human-root' motif is interesting; the root was glossed as *āḷvaḷḷi*, i.e., a kind of wild yam (*Dioscorea daemona*), which is used in magic since the root vaguely resembles the human figure. This, no doubt, brings to mind the use of the mandrake alias mandragora, a plant with forked root used in medieval European witchcraft.

A fairy-tale more complex — but also much wittier and more charming — is the story of a widow's clever son, told masterfully by Bīmä of Kūnjapeṇe on February 8, 1978.

A widow worked for daily wages that were the exact equivalent of one measure of millet flour. She baked *dōsas* — typical South Indian pancakes — and fed herself and her son. One day, while she went to fetch water, a beggar came to the village, and the poor widow's son gave him the two *dōsas'* alms. When the mother returned, there was nothing to eat, but the boy said, "Well, you always taught me that by giving alms one earns merit. I shall go today itself to see god and ask him for boons." And he went. On his way, he stretched out under a mango tree that was full of fruits, but they were unripe, and no one, not even a bird or a monkey, could eat them. The boy was hungry. At that moment, the mango tree asked him where he was going. "Oh, let me go and don't ask silly questions! I'm suffering from hunger, but you could not throw even a single fruit to me!" "That's just it," complained the mango tree. "My fruits never ripen. I am completely useless!" "I see," said the boy. "Well, I'm going to see god and ask for boons. I'll ask him what's wrong with you!" And he went. On his way he saw a lame horse. "Ask the Lord," begged the horse, "why I am lame? Is it some black magic? Or his will?" The boy promised to ask and went on. People were building a bridge over a large river. Although they tried for fifteen years, the bridge always collapsed and they could not finish it. The boy promised to enquire and find out the reason. As he went, he saw a cobra that got stuck in an ant hill; it could not get inside, it could not get out. So the boy promised to ask what was the matter with the unfortunate reptile. Then he came across a hermit; he was sitting on one spot, glued to that place, and could not move about. The boy promised to enquire after his fate, too.

Finally, he reached the fortress and town of Dāsikōṭṭe. The queen of that place, though married, had no children. As it was almost nighttime, the boy found an empty hut and entered. There was an odd person there — an old hunter or a beggar — and when the boy told him where he was going and why, the old man said, "When you get up at dawn tomorrow, tell the people of Dāsikōṭṭe that at half past seven, the queen will give birth to a

child. Also, tell the people that you know what to do with the child: place it in a separate room on the large leave of the gujja-plantain, ask the mother to go away, and give the child a bath. Let the child speak to you."

The boy, strangely enough, believed everything the old man said. When he woke up, the old hunter-beggar (who was none else than Siva himself) was gone. The boy told the people of the town what would happen, and they were amazed. But at seven o'clock the queen went into labor, and in another half hour a boy was born. The poor widow's son talked to him. "Svami," he said, "I have come to ask you for boons. As I went, I saw a mango tree . . ." "I know," said the newborn baby. "Near the roots of that mango tree there's a treasure — seven vessels with gold coins. If the tree gives the money away, it will prosper and its fruits will ripen." "And the lame horse?" "Is lame because no one has ridden it. As soon as someone will ride it, it will be whole." "And what about the bridge?" "There are two girls. If someone will marry those two girls — the daughters of the ruler of that country — the bridge will stand. If not, it will always collapse because of the sin of a nonaccomplished marriage." "And the snake?" "The snake has a jewel inside. If it were to spit it out and give it to someone, it would be able to move." "And what about the hermit glued with his buttocks to one spot?" "That's because he has not revealed to anyone his great healing knowledge. As soon as he teaches to someone his doctor's wisdom, he'll be able to get up. Anything else?" "That is all, Lord," said the boy and the child smiled and said, "All right, go in peace."

As soon as the boy left Dāsikōṭṭe, it all went up in flames. It was like a dream, and maybe it was dream. But the boy went back, and the hermit taught him how to heal people, and the snake spat out the precious stone and gave it to the boy, and the king gave him his two daughters for wives in exchange for the bridge, and the lame horse said, "Climb up on me, all of you, and ride me!" And it was at once whole. Finally, the mango tree agreed that they would dig out a treasure: seven vessels with gold coins. The boy placed them, too, on the horse, and they reached home, built a large house, and lived with the mother and the two wives in prosperity and happiness.

This fairy tale is self-explanatory. The following one[2] is more bizarre; it is important in that it underlines the overall tribal attitude toward the cobra as a benevolent and mysterious animal with close and special ties to human beings. Also, the motif of a father testing his sons on a bright full-moon night is found in Kota lore; as in the Irula story, the youngest son wants to spend the night in enjoyment and is rejected by his father.[3]

On the auspicious day of the full-moon night, the father of five sons asked his five boys what they should do in the bright moonlight. "Turn the soil with the hoe and water it," said the eldest. "May you prosper!" answered the father. "We may do some threshing work," said the next son, and he was blessed. "We may dig out roots," said the third son, and he was blessed, too. "We may boil rice," said the fourth boy. "You, too, are a good son," said the father. "Let's chew some betel," said the fifth, the youngest son, "and then go whoring. That'll be nice." "You fool," shouted the father, "out of my house! You won't prosper! Fie on you!" But the mother gave him some money and a horse, and thus the young man and his wife left home. When they reached the town, there was no king. The ministers just sent a large tusker out into the world with the proclamation that whomever the elephant would pick out would be crowned as king. The elephant picked out our boy! The boy was carried to the

queen (his wife followed on horseback) and made king. However, there was no intimacy between him and the queen. Inside the palace, there was an ant hill, and in the ant hill lived a male king-cobra. He was the lover of the queen. [As the narrator said, "The snake came inside the woman and went on doing it."] Of the union of the queen and the cobra, a male child was born. The young king, wanting to find out who fathered the child, arranged it so that he and the queen and the child all slept in one bed. The snake came as usual and thought, "If I bite the king and he dies, it will be a great sin; I cannot kill my sweetheart, the queen, the mother of my child; and I cannot kill my child!" So the poor cobra committed suicide: it hanged itself on the hair of the queen. When the queen woke up, she made a small funeral pyre and burned the snake. The young king named the boy Nāgappan [the serpent's son]; then he invited his mother and father and brothers to come live with him and the queen and his wife in the palace.

Among all Irula narratives, I always liked the short anecdotal stories best. Most of them seemed to be genuine Irula, well-known throughout the tribe, and the Irulas immensely enjoyed my surprise, delight, and laughter when these *contes drolatiques* were told. As I watched Mr. Rajiah, my assistant, taking so much genuine pleasure in listening to these narrations, I realized how very much alive the oral tradition and narrative art still are in India and how sad it is that in our culture "the media" have almost totally annihilated the art of conversation, the skill of telling a story, the joy of listening to a good *raconteur*.

The following was told on February 2, 1978, by Masaṇa Mēstiri, a shrewd, witty, charming Irula of Kūnjapeṇe, about sixty years old: There lived a man in a village who had plenty of fields and other lands. Daily he took to different markets all the brinjals and chilies and other vegetables that grew on his estate. And it seems, too, that he had plenty of excellent milk, curds, paddy, rice, and so on. But the wife of this man would cook *rāgi* with the 'crow-greens' and wrap them in a bundle for him to take along every day. One day he began to ask himself what it was that his wife was really doing at home, and he thought that he should go and see. So much rice, so much milk and buttermilk and curds and vegetables, and she was giving him only miserable greens — who eats all those things? To whom does she give all those things? What does it mean? He must find out.

So, on that day, he went out of the house as usual, but suddenly returned. "Why have you come back?" asked the wife. "I have a strong bellyache, and also I've got a strong headache, that's why I didn't go today. That's why I came back."

Well, what she apparently was doing when he had left the house was that the very man who lived next door would come to her house and sit and eat rice and curry and drink good coffee and all that. But on that day, when he saw the head of the husband, he ran and hid, squeezing into the niche of the *cappara*-wall.[4] That male concubine! He hid there because when the wife saw her husband returning she had shouted, "Run, hide, there, he has come, *cappara*, *cappara*, to the *cappara*, he has come!"

When the husband came and unloaded, he said, "I've got a headache, my stomach pains," and, laying down, he added, "Is there some rice?" "Yes, there is. There is plenty," said the wife, who cooked rice and curry and all. He obviously ate well that day.

Apparently, even before this neighbor had come to the house, another man had come, and the second neighbor did not see the first, who was squeezed into a corner. So when the second neighbor climbed up onto the

*cappara*, the two became caught in a lot of smoke from her fire. There's a lot of smoke in the *cappara*. The one who had come earlier had eaten his belly full, and now he was terribly thirsty; he could not even open his mouth and speak. He saw the second neighbor come, but the second did not see him. It is dark there. They longed for water. In their terrible thirst, they screamed, "Hiiiih!" The husband of the woman asked, "What is that scream?" She said, "*Cī*, that must be the house god demanding a coconut." "Then there is surely a coconut for the house god." "Yes, here it is." The husband took a coconut and threw it up onto the *cappara*. How to break it? The man who had hid first was there in the darkness, and his head was shining for it was bald. The second man took the coconut and bang! He broke it against the head of the bald one! How he screamed! The two men fell, ran out, and left. The husband asked, "What was that?" "Those were the two house gods fighting for that coconut!" said the wife. But the husband shouted, "Aaah, so it was because of them that I had to starve for so many days!" And at once he poured water into a large copper drum and heated it. Then he threw his wife in and boiled her.

Not exactly a happy ending. A less drastic story is a short narrative about the melon-husband.[5] As the owner of a vegetable garden came into his garden, he saw a single watermelon, which began to speak. It said, "Don't be afraid or surprised at this. I am here to protect your garden; you are here to protect me." But the garden owner plucked it all the same and took it home. There it became a human being, and it said, "I want to marry a woman." But everyone refused saying, "I won't give my daughter to a watermelon." Finally, the owner of the melon found a very poor man who said, "After all, if the melon provides rice, let him have my daughter. And if he won't provide for her, she may eat him!" And he married off his girl to the watermelon. The melon-husband rolled to the house of the father-in-law, rattling *kaḍamuḍakaḍamuḍa*, and thus he came, unbroken, to the paternal house of his bride. It sat down on the mat, was fed by the mother-in-law, and then came straight to the point: to consummate the marriage. However, before the intercourse, a bath had to be prepared. When the bath was ready, the watermelon husband took off his melon peel and appeared as a handsome lad. The young wife wanted to take away the peel-cover and burn it, but her melon husband prohibited her to do so. After a week's time, when they bathed again, his mother-in-law grabbed the peel-cover and burned it. The boy was given a new *muṇḍu* [dress of cloth], everyone was pleased what a handsome fellow the girl had married, and they lived happily ever after.

For the native speakers, the charm of this simple narrative is the fact that everything is as it should not be, reversed. In India (including the Irula tribal communities), it is the bride who goes to live with her husband's family in their house after marriage. Here it is the melon husband who goes to live in his wife's home. The sexual intercourse right after the first feeding of the husband would be considered impossibly uncouth. The relationship of the bridegroom to his mother-in-law is, in actuality, limited to the barest minimum, for it is the relationship of the bride to her mother-in-law that counts; but in this story, the bride's mother is uncharacteristically one of the main actors. All this transposition of the standard, 'natural' order of things is of course related to the fact, considered funny and bizarre, that a melon functions as a human husband.

The oddest — but probably at the same time rather significant — short anecdotal story that I collected is the one about the woman with the breasts

on the back.[6] The motif of *kuṇḍacärimule* [breasts on the back] also appears in proverbs and sayings and is well-known to all Irulas.

There was a woman who had breasts on her backside; otherwise she was very pretty. There was also a young man who rather liked her, and she liked him — but the breasts on her back were an obstacle to a happy union. She invited him to do something about it. Well, he told her to bend, which she did, then inspected her clitoris by sniffing and touching, and in the next moment he took a knife, cut it off, and put it in his pocket. Then he told the woman, "Lay naked for nine days. I'll do what is needed." He peeled off the bark of the *aḍuguḍu* tree,[7] placed it on the wound where he had previously cut off her breasts, and made her back even. The breasts reappeared on the frontside. The man took nine vessels, filled them with *pongal*,[8] and offered them to the deity, prostrating himself in gratitude. Then he married the woman.

Does cutting off the clitoris refer to the rite of clitoridectomy or some other kind of genital mutilation once practiced? One of the informants (Rāmä, about forty-five years old) maintained that the man cut off the clitoris (Ir. *mōnakoṭṭe*) because it was "somewhat high" (*konjo oyaro*); he added explicitly that "in those days" women had "it" long and large and that it was the custom to cut it.

But the narrative contains yet other allusions and has a deeper meaning, pertaining probably to puberty rites. It was explained to me that the woman had nothing at all in front, she was quite plain. The *kuṇḍacäri mule*[9] and the flat chest probably stand for the prepubertal stage in the development of the girl. The young man's actions probably signify defloration in the first intercourse, followed by placement of a magical healing bark on the wound and an offering to the deity (*toga*). This whole folklore may indeed refer to the transformation of the sexually unripe girl into a sexually ripe woman capable of entering wedded life — the transformation accompanied by clitoridectomy and ritual defloration.

Bīmä of Kūnjapeṇe told his naughtiest story on February 6, 1978. There was a young fellow, and that young fellow has had since long a liking for a woman. However, he was unable to get that particular lady. The man was constantly feeling the desire, but he could not meet her or even go near her. Then one day her husband went hunting. When he was gone, the youngster felt a burning wish, thinking, "Oh, woman, this is my opportunity; somehow I must have you today." At that time the woman was frying millet in a pan in the fireplace. As she was bending down to the front, her dress slipped away, and the man gazed into the opening in the wall of her hut. He saw "it!" Right away he inserted his penis into the opening in the wall. As soon as his penis was in, she grabbed it, took the frying rod, and — tuck! — chopped it off with one blow. The blow was so violent that only the handle remained in her hand; everything else, including the penis, went to pieces.

One of the most interesting tales, which has the grim fascination of a heroic and bloody ballad, is the Irula version of a well-known Tamil folklore motif — the love and marriage between a man and a woman (or women) belonging to two entirely different (and often antagonistic) social groups. The following dramatic story, which I heard in 1968, could probably be classified as a subtype of 'realistic' story with a moral; however, it also has a definite heroic-legendary flavor.

A Brahmin youth, Nāraṇa, quarreled with his father and left his paternal home to seek employment at Trichur under a Kerala ruler. He was talented

and hard-working, and in a few years became quite prosperous. His fame spread. His brothers learned about him, visited him at Trichur, and persuaded him to return home, get married, and settle down. However, on their way back, beyond Mettupalaiyam, in the Nilgiri forest, they met two Irula girls, and Nāraṇa fell in love with them. He refused to go on along with his brothers, telling them that he would stay in the forest and marry the two Irula maidens.

The brothers attempted first to talk him out of his decision, then to force him, and finally to kill him, but he escaped. He found the father of the girls who was an Irula chieftain named Kōvan and asked him to give him his daughters in marriage. The Irula was hesitant: on the one hand, he would love to have his daughters married to a Brahmin youth; on the other hand, he was shocked and scared, and he finally tried to dissuade Nāraṇa, but in vain. He gave his consent only when Nāraṇa promised to observe certain conditions: to renounce the marks of his caste, to tend herds of Badaga cows entrusted to the care of the Irulas, to take part in Irula hunting and killing of animals, and to eat and drink what the Irulas used to eat and drink. The young Brahmin agreed, married the two daughters of the Irula chief, and when the old man died, Nāraṇa was elected chief of the Irula tribe. Because he was so highly intelligent and resourceful, the Irula community flourished. However, this provoked the envy and hatred of the old enemies of the Irulas, the Muḍugas. They plotted to destroy Nāraṇa. Being accomplished cattle-thieves, one night they drove away the cows entrusted to the Irulas by the Badagas. A clash between the Irulas and Badagas followed, and Nāraṇa was killed when he tried to stop the fighting. His two wives committed suicide by hurling themselves down the Ulikïḍangu Waterfall. The Irula people erected three memorial stones in the memory of their Brahmin chieftain Nāraṇa and his two Irula wives, Ponni and Vëḷḷi. The stones are worshipped, and I have seen them.

Of an entirely different tone, full of wit and surprising situations, is the entertaining Irula narrative of Ayyakappä, which is also known among the Tamils of Satyamangalam. I was told the story by an informant from the Tengumarahada region in Ooty in 1968.

The king and his minister used to go round the country to see how their subjects lived. Once they came — incognito — into the Irula village of Suruṇḍi, went to the first hut (which belonged to an Irula lad called Ayyakappä), and said, "We are tired travelers, on our way from the Raja of Kerala to the Sultan of Maisur. Can we rest and eat with you?" Ayyakappä asked his mother to prepare a good Irula dinner; he was lucky in that respect because he had caught in his snare a large monitor lizard that day.

The king and his minister relished their dinner, and after the food, the king said, "We enjoyed your food and company. Now if you have any wish, say it." "If only I could become for one single day the king of this country," sighed Ayyakappä. "Well, maybe your wish will be fulfilled." Then the minister took out some betel and areca nut from his box — the Irulas are very fond of betel — and offered it to the young man. However, after a few moments of chewing the betel leaf, Ayyakappä fell unconscious — the leaves were drugged.

In the night the king and his minister secretly took the Irula lad to the palace and put him in the king's bed, dressed like the king. No one saw them.

In the morning, when Ayyakappä found himself in the royal chamber and faced the first minister, he first thought that he was dreaming and tried to sleep again. But the first minister kept on waking him, and so the Irula youth decided to get up, sat on the throne, heard the people's wishes, passed on orders — in short, ruled. The real king watched while hidden in secrecy and had great fun.

Suddenly, Ayyakappä remembered his mother in the Irula village and some of his enemies who had once cheated him. He issued two orders: to take ten thousand gold coins to his mother and to bring his two enemies, shave their heads, and ride them on a donkey through the city.

The day was then spent in the pleasures of the palate, in entertainments with the girls of the harem, and in plays and games. Finally a grand dinner was served, after which Ayyakappä was again given drugged betel, which made him swoon.

The next morning he found himself in his tribal hut. He called his ministers — but, of course, it was his mother who came running: "Why are you shouting? Where were you yesterday?" "Who are you, woman?" said Ayyakappä. "Me? Am I not your mother?" "My mother?" shouted the lad. "I am the king! How can you be my mother?"

"Don't talk nonsense. The king! Ha! Do you know that the king had yesterday punished Koppan and Muttan, your old enemies? So better be careful, the king is very severe!" "It was me, it was me!" shouted Ayyakappä.

"And do you know that the king is also very kind? He sent us yesterday ten thousand gold pieces! We are rich!" "It was me, it was me!" roared Ayyakappä. "I am the king. How can you be my mother?" And he jumped up, took a cane, and began beating her. She screamed and the neighbors came, overpowered him, and took him down to the town's prison.

In the prison he was flogged every day and given hardly any food. His mother visited him daily, and finally Ayyakappä came to his senses and said, "Mother, I am not the king. I am your son. Forgive me." The happy woman got him released and took him home.

A few days later the king and his minister, both in disguise, came again to the village of Suruṇḍi. When Ayyakappä saw them approaching he hid behind a tree. But the king saw him. "Why are you hiding? Come, we are hungry; give us some food!" "Go away," shouted Ayyakappä, "I won't have anything to do with you!" The king frowned, and the scared Irula lad could do nothing but take the king and his minister to the hut and have dinner prepared. While they were eating, he narrated everything that had happened to him, showing the bruises on his back. The king expressed his regrets and handed to Ayyakappä a beautiful flower. As soon as the young Irula smelled it, he fell unconscious and was taken to the royal palace.

In the morning, when he found himself in the king's bed and the minister came to wake him up, Ayyakappä shouted, "Go away! I am not the king. I am not even a king! I am a poor miserable Irula from the forest! Last time I became king I was flogged!" And he even showed the first minister his bruised back. The real king, who was watching all this from behind a screen, could hardly control himself. He came out and said, "Well, how are you this morning?" Ayyakappä finally understood, fell prostrate at the ruler's feet, and said, "I am well." The king introduced him to the queen and told him to come visit whenever he would wish to do so.

Ayyakappä used to come there from time to time, and he fell in love with a palace maid. The queen and king agreed to give him the maid in

marriage. Ayyakappä built a grand house for himself and lived comfortably with his wife and mother. But soon they spent all of their wealth on themselves and other Irulas. Ayyakappä decided to get some money from the king by a trick. He asked his wife to spread her hair, put on a white sari, go to the queen, and ask her for money to perform funeral rites for her husband, who has just died. The queen felt awfully sorry and gave her one thousand gold pieces; she also invited the young 'widow' to come and stay with her.

The wife went home and gave the money to Ayyakappä, who then put on a dirty cloth, spread his hair widely, and ran to the king: "Your majesty! Your maid, my wife, died suddenly yesterday after a long illness. All the money you gave me was spent on her medicines, I don't have one single rupee to perform the rites!" The king felt sorry and gave him one thousand gold pieces. He then went to inform the queen of the sad event.

After they talked to each other, the king sent a man to Ayyakappä's village of Suruṇḍi to find out the truth. As soon as Ayyakappä saw the man, he made his wife lie down on her mat, and he began to weep. The man saw him, returned to the palace, and reported to the king that Ayyakappä's wife had died and that Ayyakappä was alive and lamenting. The queen was stunned; she sent one of her maids to find out the truth. As soon as Ayyakappä saw the maid, he lay down on the mat, and his wife started lamenting over his body. The maid reported to the queen that indeed Ayyakappä was dead.

The king, on horseback, and the queen in her palanquin went, then, in person to the Irula village to find out the truth. As soon as Ayyakappä saw them, both he and his wife laid down on their mats, pretending to be dead. When the king and queen approached the two 'bodies,' the king said, "First the wife died, and then the poor lad died of grief." They started arguing. In the end, the king shouted, "I will give a whole village down under the hills to anyone who will tell me the truth — this I swear by Siva's trident!" Hearing these words, Ayyakappä jumped up and shouted, "Majesty! I died first!" At the same moment, the maid fell at the queen's feet and said, "My lady, I died first."

The king and queen laughed so much that they almost burst. Ayyakappä and his wife indeed received a whole village down under the hills, in Tengumarahada, and it was theirs and of their Irula progeny till the Badagas came and took it away from them.

The Irulas are very fond of animal fables, and I have quite a few among my texts. They usually revolve — as do most Indian narratives, both sacred and profane — around two very basic, very important, quite ubiquitous character traits: shrewdness (*buddhi*) and self-respect (*tanmāna*). Without exception, the shrewd, cunning one is admired and wins (e.g., the jackal). In our context, self-respect would probably be designated instead as inordinate pride, but the Indian is almost ignorant of the virtues of modesty and humility — or rather, these are not virtues for him. Animal fables show these qualities in plenty.

With a belly burning with hunger, a jackal[10] roamed about in a ground-nut field and met a pig. The jackal, out of sheer desperation, was feeding on ground nuts when the owner of the field chased the two animals away; but the jackal succeeded in placing a few ground nuts into its pocket. As they ran, it was munching the ground nuts noisily, and the pig, panting behind the jackal, asked, "Hey, brother jackal, what are you eating? As I keep running like this, I am terribly hungry!" At that, the jackal said, "I

have scooped out one of my eyes and am eating it. Why don't you do the same?" The pig scooped out one eye and ate it. As they ran, the jackal kept on munching the ground nuts with gusto, and the pig asked, "Do you think, brother jackal, that I could eat my other eye, too? I'm awfully hungry! Only I won't see then!" "Don't worry," laughed the jackal, "I'll tell you precisely where and how to go." So the pig ate its other eye. The jackal said, "When I say go, you go. When I say stand still, you stand still. When I say jump, jump!" They ran, and the jackal took the pig to a high rock. Below the rock were farmers working on a field. The jackal said, "Come on, brother pig, there's a small pit; jump a little!" The pig jumped down the rock. The farmers ran to get it, took it, cut it to pieces, and prepared a fire to roast it. The jackal came stealthily and unobserved, set fire to a heap of straw, and started yelling, "Hey, people, your straw sheaf is on fire! Come on!" They all ran to put out the fire, and the jackal sat down at ease and consumed the pig in peace.

I heard the following 'animal' anecdote at Kaḷampaḷḷa on March 17, 1978. In a village lived two men: one owned a male buffalo, another a female buffalo. The female buffalo gave birth to a calf. The two buffaloes stood side by side, and the calf, not knowing who was its mother, sucked the penis of the male buffalo. The owner of the male buffalo saw it — and claimed the calf as his own! Naturally, a quarrel followed, the panchayat was convened, and a fox was summoned as witness for the owner of the female buffalo. The fox rolled itself in black coal. It came to the panchayat all 'burnt.' Why? Because, said the fox, it has just quenched the burning sea. People began to laugh; this is an impossible story! It is equally impossible, said the fox, that a male buffalo gives birth to a calf.

Do you know how the elephant came into being? The Irulas have the following weird tale as to its origin.[11] Two Irula sisters lived in the same house. The elder sister was wicked. She would eat well, but she would give her younger sister only husks to eat and treat her, in general, hideously. The younger sister was first annoyed, then angry, then furious and thirsting for revenge. "One day I will kill you; wait." That's what she said — and did. How? She became an elephant. She took four large wooden mortars and used them for legs. For the head, she used the sickle. For the ears, there were two winnowing baskets. For the trunk, the pestle. She placed all these things together, and for her body she used a long basket for storing grains. Then she changed these things magically into an elephant and entered its body. In the shape of the elephant, she went to a water well, and as her sister came to fetch water, she caught her and crushed her to pieces. Then she disappeared in the forest. That's why the elephant is a dangerous animal, full of fury and cunning.

A special type of Irula story contains what has been termed the 'echo-word' motif.[12] An echo word, as defined by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, expresses "the thing denoted by the basic nouns and things similar to or associated with that" (1928:7-8). In a number of stories told by speakers of different languages (e.g., Tamil, Toda, Kota, Koḍagu, Irula, Kuṟumba) the same linguistic basis — an echo word — forms the motif that carries the entire tale. "A man says aloud to himself or to his flock that precautions must be taken against any tiger or demon that may come to do mischief," wrote M. B. Emeneau.

> In each case the tiger or the demon is represented by an echo word. A tiger or a demon overhears and, in accordance with the general stupid nature of these creatures in the folk-lore, misunderstands. It knows that it is itself the tiger or demon, but does not know what the meaningless second member of the compound denotes and fears that it is something even more terrible than itself. Some unexpected event then happens to it, and it is outwitted, thinking that the agency of this event is the fearsome creature denoted by the meaningless word. (1938b:555)

Such echo words found in these stories are, e.g., *bhūta-kūta* (Tamil)[13] 'goblins and similar creatures,' *puj gïj* (Kota) 'tiger and similar animals,' *kaḷṇ giḷṇ* (Kota) 'thieves and [other] people,' *püṣy xiṣy* (Toda) 'tiger and like animals,' *puli-gili* (Tamil) 'tiger and similar animals,' and *püli gili* in the Irula story that follows:

There was a rich man in a village who employed someone to graze his goats. Once he had to go away, and he warned his goatherd: "A tiger or something like it (*püli-gili*) may come and get the goats. Be careful!" The tiger was already hiding nearby and heard what the rich farmer said. It wondered who the *gili* was. When the darkness fell, the tiger jumped into the stall to steal a goat. At the same time, three rogues came to steal goats and naturally wanted to grab the fattest. Since it was pitch-dark, they went about touching all the goats, and when they touched the tiger's hind parts, they thought that this was the fattest goat. They jumped on it and rode on it through the night, and the tiger was scared because it thought, "They must be the three *gilis*!" Suddenly the one who was sitting in the tiger's back touched its tail, found out the true nature of the animal, got frightened, and said, "I must go and pass urine," and jumped off. Then the one who was sitting in front touched the tiger's head and, recognizing the animal he was riding, got frightened to death and jumped off, whispering, "I must at once go and defecate." The third man sitting in the middle recognized, too, that this was not a goat but a tiger, and as he was riding he got a hold of a bough of a tree, climbed up, and hid there. The tiger was at first relieved, but then he got furious and, thinking of the three *gilis*, ran about until he met a bear. He told him, "I had a very strange encounter with three *gilis;* two have escaped, one sits in a tree. Come, I'll show you." "Fine," said the bear, and they went back. When they reached the tree, the bear began to climb it backwards; but the man gave him a terrific kick in the buttocks, and the tiger and the bear, scared, ran away. They met a jackal, who laughed and took them back to the tree. In the meantime, the man hid in a deserted hut and shut the door. When the three came near, the jackal prowled around, and as it approached the hut its tail got entangled between the bamboo sticks of the hut's wall. The man caught it and twisted it off. The bear and the tiger, terrified, ran away and never came back, and the jackal died in pain.

Thus, in this tale, somewhat uncharacteristically, even the jackal is outwitted — and by men. There is another story in my corpus where the jackal is outwitted by a very clever Irula boy with a sling. Speaking of wit, the Irulas very often tell each other riddles, some of them rather complicated. I shall quote two "classic" ones.

A mother and a daughter were going on a path. They met a father with his son. As they went, the path divided in two. The father went with the daughter, and the son went with the mother. They went into the forest, and the father embraced the woman's daughter, while his son embraced the mother. After some time, a male child was born to the son, and a female child was born to the father. What relationship (*more*) is there between the child of the father and the child of the son?[14]

Another riddle was told by the Ūrāḷi Rāyappan, on March 1, 1978. A person came from some place and another person came from another place. They met, and the one who came from the south asked the one who came from the north, "What's new in your place?" The answer was, "It is all green — without rain!" Then the southerner asked once more, "What's new in addition in your place?" And the northerner answered, "In our village, the mouth gets red without chewing betel." What is it? The answer to the riddle is "Green parrot with red beak."

There are short riddles, too. My informant P. Sivaraj emphatically maintained that whenever Irulas speak, they will say riddles. And, indeed, I spent some hours listening to enthusiastic Irula children in the tribal residential school at Kūnjapeṇe shouting dozens of riddles at me, and when I happened to guess right (this occurred rarely), my pronouncement was met with roaring delight (literally).

"You can't count the areca nuts; you can't roll the mat. What is it?" "The stars in the sky."

"A beetle humming in a dark house. What is it?" "A grinding stone."

"One handle for five spears?" "The hand."

"An Irula woman with backside breasts?" "A winnowing fan."

"Two hundred monkeys and only one tail." "A bunch of bananas."

"A wrinkled scrotum dancing in the market place." "Pepper."

What fantasy! The top one is probably the following: "There's no ash in the oven wherein a barren woman and a barren man cook. What's that?" Answer: "A double-barreled gun."

The Irulas sing a lot. I have published about a dozen songs elsewhere; hence, I wish to give only a very few selected specimens here. It is unfortunate that Irula youths imitate Tamil movie songs and Irula children are taught Tamil songs in the tribal schools. Nevertheless, there are some genuine Irula songs still in circulation. Some examples are the *dua uga pāṭṭu* — the song through which the deity (*dua*) is invited to come and enter a *jāyakārä;* or some love songs; or the bear song; or some rather obscene songs; or maybe this little song about the marvel of marvels, the tiny train from Mettupalaiyam to Ooty:

On the stony road from the northern country
it runs there
over the bridge which trembles and shakes
the train which goes over the bridge
our train
the green train
our train
the coral-red train

Here are two hitherto unpublished songs from my tapes:

The snakes copulate again and again
The he-goats copulate again and again
The jungle fowls shriek in passion
The sun copulates with the clouds
I will take you and shake you
And put my penis between your thighs
How your clitoris rises

Fifteen drummers drum
Fifteen men dance
My head aches
My legs hurt
My chest aches
My back aches
I cannot dance
I cannot dance

Of Irula dance I can hardly say anything at all except that I have seen Mele Nāḍu Irulas, Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas, and Ūrāḷis dancing with vigor and pleasure on different occasions. In Kōyikere, men danced to the beating of various drums in front of a house where the body of an old woman who had recently died was still inside. The dance was part of the funeral ritual; its main purpose was to drive away ghosts and goblins lurking around and endangering every dead body. There was nothing sad or funereal about the dance. Music, rather loud and fast, was energetically produced, and the men danced in a ring, first to one side, then to the other, with rather simple steps.

The Ūrāḷis of Būdimāḍu danced for a while as part of a very simple ritual. The Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas of Mēle Muḷḷi (in Kerala) danced for pure pleasure and to please us. But the most vigorous, and indeed unforgettable, dance we witnessed was in Gundri, in the darkness of early night, with drums accompanied by the ringing song of the crickets; the dancers, both men and women, illuminated by the orange light of open fires. Although Catholic nuns were around and a jeep stood nearby in the darkness, this was one of the nights when I was part of a different world, a tribal world, a primeval world in which everything danced: the Ūrāḷi men and women, the crickets, even the stars on the sky over Gundri.

On the music, too, I can say only a little — not being at all an expert. Among the musical instruments, I noted idiophones made of dried gourds filled with nuts or dried seeds or small pebbles to produce a rhythmic rattling sound while dancing; at least three or four types of membranophones (drums) and wind instruments. No stringed instruments were noted.

The drums were roughly of three types: flat frame drum (*tamboṭe*); long, cylindrical drum (*daviḷu*); and shorter, rounder cylindrical bifacial drums of different sizes (*poṛe, maḍalu, kaḍime*). The faces of the drums are covered with buffalo hide tied with rope lacing. They are usually beaten with hands, except for the *tamboṭe*, which is beaten with *kōlu* [sticks] as well as with hands. The Irulas smear the skins of the drums with hot ashes before they use them, or they just hold them for a while near the fire to tighten the skin

so as to obtain good sound. Drumming is quite an art and a most important part of Irula music.

There are three very typical Irula wind instruments, all manufactured by the Irulas themselves. I am fortunate to possess a few specimens of each, and I have tried, too, to play them; it is very difficult, for it not only requires considerable skill but also strength and long breaths.

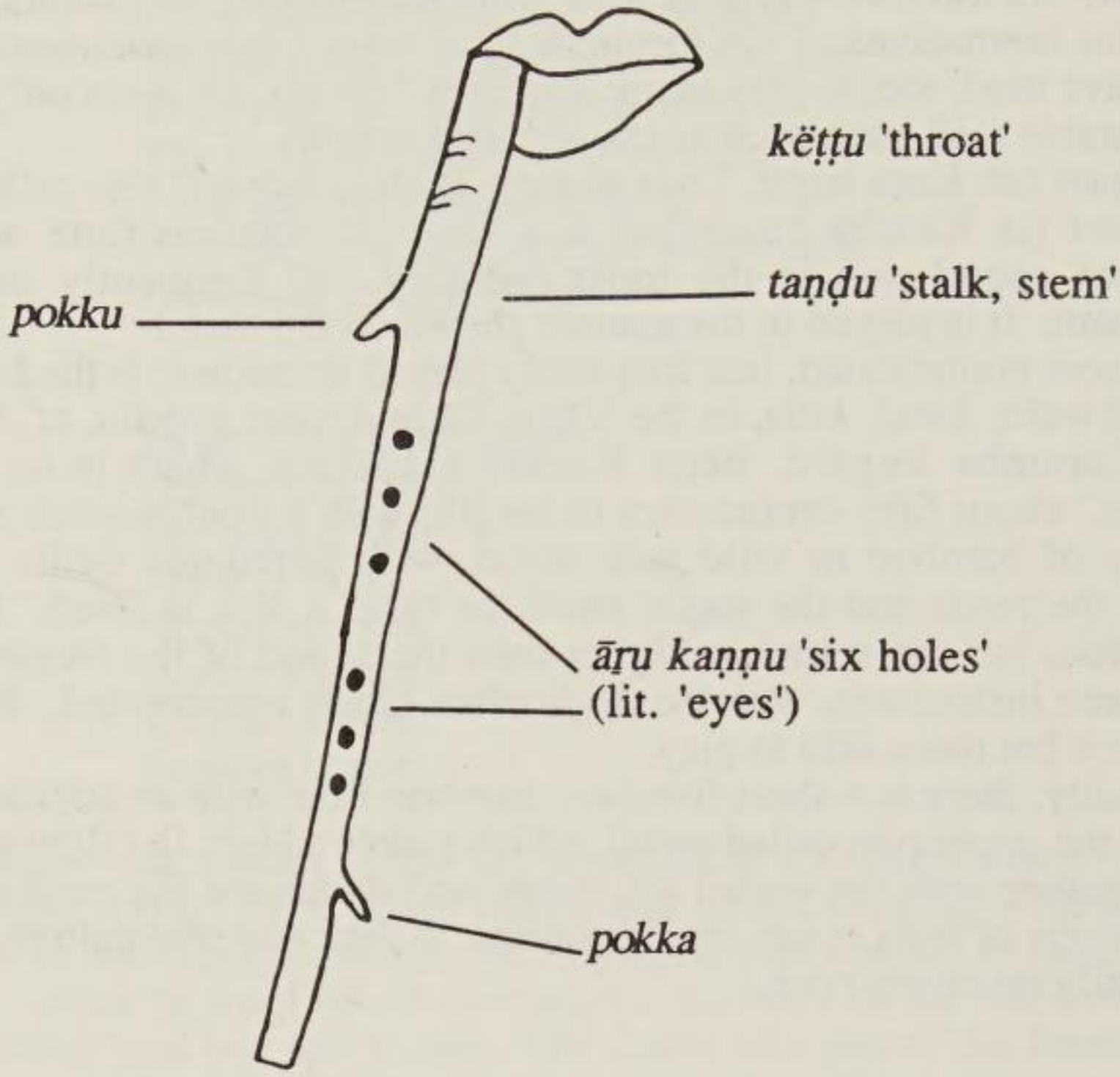
*Bugari* (cf. Kota *bugīr*, Toda *puxury*, Badaga *buguri*) also called *bogari* or *bugiri* (in Kasaba *bugiriya*) is a six-hole bamboo flute with deep sonorous sound and is the most ordinary and frequently used Irula instrument. It is played in the manner shown on the sketch.

A more complicated, less frequently played instrument is the *koálu* (also called *kwälü, kwal, kōla*, in the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu dialect *kogálu*, cf. Kota *koḷ*, Pālu Kuṛumba *kugálu*, Bëṭṭa Kuṛumba *kaḷalu*), which is an oboe, or 'clarinet,' about fifty centimeters in length; with a double-reed; and made entirely of bamboo or wild jack wood, with porcupine quills or reeds. Where the reeds and the staple enter the tube, a disk is fixed. It has six holes, too, but the sound is higher than the sound of the *bugari*. It is a handsome instrument, with the *koḍe* often nicely ornamented. It requires less force but more skill to play.

Finally, there is a short five-hole bamboo flute with an additional sixth hole in the upper part called *turuli*, which makes a high, flat fluty sound.

Together with the verbal art, music and dance are the most important expressions of Irula creativity, in contrast to their material culture, which is artistically relatively poor.

**Bugari**




**Koálu**

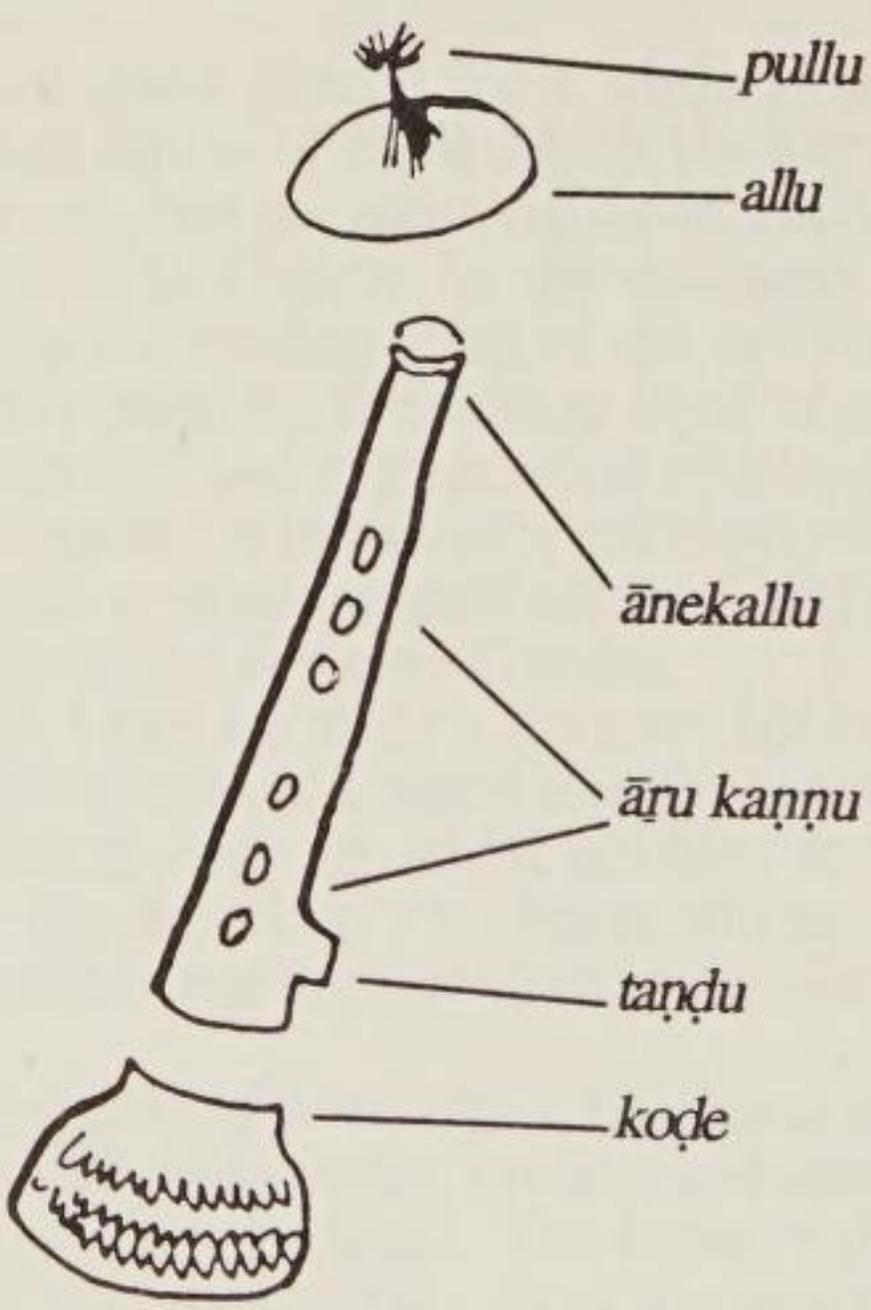



Fig. 27: Two Irula wind instruments

Fig. 28: Irula musicians with oboes, Kōyikere (1978)

Fig. 29: Irula musicians with drums, Kōyikere (1978)

# Notes

[1] Told by a Mele Nāḍu informant about forty years old, at Kaḷampaḷḷa on March 17, 1978.

[2] Told by a Mele Nāḍu informant about forty years old, at Kaḷampaḷḷa on March 17, 1978.

[3] Cf. M. B. Emeneau, *Kota Texts*, pt. 3, p. 43 ff., the story of Čakōl.

[4] The *cappara* (pronounced [sápp∧ra]) is a typical part of a native Irula house: it is a raised platform, usually situated partly over the fireplace portion of the hut, used for placing utensils, storing things, etc. Since Irula huts, as a rule, have no windows, it is rather dark inside, and one can imagine a person crouching in hiding on the *cappara*, remaining unnoticed.

[5] Told by Basuvayya, Mele Nāḍu Irula about forty years old, at Kaḷampaḷḷa on March 17, 1978.

[6] Told by Bīmä of Kūnjapeṇe, on February 6, 1978.

[7] Could not be identified botanically but was glossed as the healing bark of a magical tree.

[8] Sweet rice-pudding.

[9] The motif of breasts, which are not quite as they should be, that are "corrected" owing to a newly established relationship between a man and a woman underlies the well-known Tamil myth of the three breasted goddess of Madurai, Taṭātakai-Mīnākṣī. Cf. Parañcōtimuṉivar (16-17th century), *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṛpurāṇam*, 'The Purāṇa of Sacred Sports,' 4 and 5. The clitoris is also the seat of magical force, apart from being the source of ever-present curiosity (cf. the songs in this chapter): even Mother Earth (Būmi Tāyi) has her clitoris — the ant hill.

[10] A fable told by Bīmä on February 6, 1978.

[11] Told by Masaṇa Mēstiri at Kūnjapeṇe on February 8, 1978.

[12] Cf. M. B. Emeneau (1938b: 559-70), where he has discussed Kota, Koḍagu, and Toda versions of Tamil folk tales built around the echo-word motif that was first published by S. N. Natesa Sastri in his *Folklore in Southern India, Part I*, (Bombay, 1884):92, and subsequently in the *Indian Antiquary* 14 (1889): 79-81. In *JAOS* 59 (1939): 503-5, Emeneau has added a Tamil folk tale about *puli-gili*. W. Norman Brown (*AJP* 42 [1921]: 137, 145-47) mentions a Sinhalese tale of the first type as classified by

Emeneau (with a leopard substituted for the tiger, which does not occur in Ceylon). The echo-word motif also occurs in M. Frere's *Old Deccan Days* (London, 1870), e.g., in story eighteen (*rakshas-bakshas*). Cf. also my book *The Irula (Ĕṛla) Language, Part II* (Wiesbaden, 1979):106-9.

[13] Cf. Natesa Sastri's version. The echo-word has no independent meaning of its own; in Dravidian languages, it always begins with a velar consonant (*k-, g-, x-*), cf. also such Tamil instances as *paṇam-kiṇam* 'money and similar things' and *mēcai-kīcai* 'table and other furniture,' and in Irula, *orṇa-gïrṇ' allā* 'a dress and all other similar things.'

[14] Warning: there is no incestuous problem involved here! The father has sexual relations with the daughter of a stranger, not with his daughter; his son does not embrace his own mother but the mother of that other girl. The story was told by an informant at Kōyikere in 1968, who might have also told it to G. Diffloth since it occurs with only slight differences in his corpus. More interestingly, this 'riddle of mixed relationship' is found in the twenty-fifth story of the Sanskrit work *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* (cf. M. B. Emeneau's ed. and trans. [1934]:143 ff.); it is put before the king by a goblin and remains unsolved.

# 9

# Irula Religion

At first impression, the Irula religion is complex, syncretistic in character, a superficial Vaishnavism mixed with a few quite specific forms of worship. All this is rather vague. In *The Irula (Ërla) Language, Part II* (1979c:86-91), I tried to bring some order into this vague complexity, and my 1981 field trip was dedicated mainly to the investigation of the religion of the Irulas.[1]

I am now convinced that Irula religion can be described as functional polytheism (with deities adopted from both 'normative' Hinduism and the Hindu *grāmadevatā* [village deities] pantheons, mostly of the female sex, with different vaguely defined functions) mixed with remnants of a tribal religion *sui generis*. In a village, there may be as many as half a dozen or more deities worshipped on different occasions and for different purposes, but generally as protective deities and for *bāduku*, i.e., good life of the community. Also, Irula religion is organized in a complex hierarchical structure with important nuclei and nodes, and less important nebulous peripheral spots and areas. Also, it is a living thing in which deities are lost, and to which other deities are added.

The religious infrastructure, which is complex and hierarchically arranged, has its nucleus in the local level of the protective village deities and the family house-gods. They are considered to be the most powerful, effective, important, concrete, and best-defined divinities. However, in the hierarchy they appear only on the third level.

For *all* Irulas there is on the first, highest level a vague notion of the Supreme, called Pārvadi-Paramacivä.[2] The next level is occupied by two male gods, one Vaishnava (Raṅga or Raṅgacāmi) and another Saiva (Mahādeśvarasvāmi). Raṅga's sacred place is, above all, Raṅgaboṭṭu (i.e., Rangaswami Peak) and, second, the Vaishnava temple at Kāraimaḍai near Meṭṭupāḷaiyam, Coimbatore. Raṅga is supposed to have "come from"

Śrīrangapaṭṭanam (Seringapatam) in South Mysore. Mahādeśvarasvāmi (i.e., Siva) appears as Malleśvara, Mādēcura, Mādēcūrcāmi (and under other similar names), and is regarded as the high god mainly by Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas and Ūrāḷis. Also, some Irula-speaking tribes worship Siva of Nanjaṅgōḍe (i.e., Siva as Nanjuṇḍa, the Poison-Eater).

On the third level are the local village deities of which there are two kinds. First there are those that are considered Irula protective gods worshipped by all inhabitants of the village, irrespective of their membership in different clans, lineages, and houses (families). And then there are deities that are called *kuladeyva* [clan-god] or *kuḍumbatoga* [family-deity] or *kūretoga* [house-deity] (Vëṭṭe Kāḍu *pacādu, pecādu*; etymology not clear, but perhaps connected with Sanskrit *piśāca-*); these are worshipped as particular protective family-gods. The village deities and the family deities are often identical. I put two specific questions to my informants concerning the clan deities and the village deities. A common deity for all members of one clan was resolutely denied, as was the existence of one special protective (*kāpāttugadu*) deity for a village (*ūru*). The answer was, "There is not one special deity. All gods (*togāndra*, plural) are protective."

The complexity only begins at this junction. Besides the deities (*toga, deyva*) mentioned above, all Irulas worship demons or devils (*pē*), mainly female; goblins and ghosts (*gōḷu*) and monstrous demigods (*müni*); vampires (*jōke*); probably some animals (snake, tiger?); mountains; ant hills; trees; and mythical tribal heroes.

The situation among the Mele Nāḍu Irulas in Kūnjapeṇe is a good example. Pārvadi-Paramacivä is the highest deity there (*belīya beliya toga* "very great god"), described also as *ulagaku beliyavä pārvadi paramacivä* "the greatest (god) in the world is Pārvatī-Paramaśiva." However, this notion is distant, extremely vague, and rather unimportant in daily life. Next comes Raṅga, a much more concrete image. He is worshipped in two shapes: in the awesome, somewhat distant, but still very concrete form of Rangaswami Peak where the Irulas go at least once a year for the great annual festival; and as a clay figure in the very familiar shape of a hunter with a dog, worshipped a few hundred yards from the village in a local *guḍi* [shrine] under the name Sirungaraiya (< Śrī - Raṅga - Rāya). Perumāḷ Raṅgasāmi also functions as a protective family deity. Thus, the family of my best informant P. Sivaraj has two guardian deities: Kāḷitāyi 'Mother Kāḷi' and Perumāḷ Raṅgasāmi.

In Kūnjapeṇe, there are five *togāndra*, or village-deities, at the present time, in addition to the representative of Raṅga just mentioned and the individual household gods: (1) Banimakka, female, worshipped by a big feast every April; (2) Bāgavadi, female, worshipped by a very big feast every April, too; (3) Tambaṭṭekalmāri, female, connected mainly with rain; (4) Vēṭṭetoga [hunt-deity], alias Biliyatoga [great deity], neither male nor female, very old, in many ways most powerful, but worshipped only rarely, once every five to ten years, by a very big feast with animal sacrifices; and (5) Padanemāri, female, worshipped about once every two years. Among these, Bāgavadi (cf. Sanskrit Bhāgavatī) is a very important recent addition, 'acquired' as powerful 'commodity' for the Kunjapanai pantheon only in 1980. Her original residence is Alur near Sirumugei. Bīmä, the priest, and another inhabitant of Kunjapanai had a dream in which this deity appeared, showed them a tree, and told them that they should dig under it and worship her in the shape that they found there. And, lo and

behold, they indeed found a small stone in human shape on the spot; thus, there is now a 'new' *toga* at Kunjapanai.

Among the various deities worshipped by various families (*kuḍumbä*), *toga*[3] is of utmost importance. The term is used in different senses: as a general term in the meaning of a (non-Hindu) 'god' or 'deity'; in the sense of 'deity' as second part of a compound, e.g., *kuḍumbatoga* 'family deity' or Māriyammatoga; in the sense of the protective, guardian deity of an Irula social unit, the family or the tribe; and in the sense of 'worship, ritual worship,' Hindu *pūjā*.

In 1981, in Kūnjapeṇe, Jānatti Rāmä's family worshipped Padanemāri; Irulas like Kāriyä, Veḷḷei, and some others worshipped Banimakka as their 'house-god.' Priests (*būjäris*) are bound to certain shrines, deities, or both, but not to a locality; though one *būjäri* can take care of more than one shrine.

Mahādeśvarasvāmi[4] (Maheśvara, Maheśa, Malleśvara) is worshipped — somewhat nebulously and, for the most part, only emotionally or mentally — by all Irulas and, in particular, by the Vëṭṭe Kāḍus near Malleśvara Peak. In one of the origin myths, he is credited with the creation of the first men. A much more concrete and spectacular deity is Raṅga (Nīlagiriraṅga, Raṅganātha, and Raṅgasāmi), worshipped not only by Irulas of all tribes but also by Shōlegas, Badagas, and other tribal peoples of the area, as well as by some plainspeople. In older accounts, the Irulas were simply designated as "worshippers of Raṅga" and hence Vaishnavites. The following (simplified) legend accounts for the origin of Raṅga's worship. There were two Irula brothers, an older and a younger one. One day they had a fight and parted. When they met again, one of them asked, "What have you been eating?" "What have *you* been eating? asked the other. "I've been eating fruit and milk," said the younger brother. "*I* have been eating fruit and milk," maintained the elder brother, "You've been eating meat!" "That's not true!" "Well, show me," shouted the elder brother, "Vomit what you've been eating." "If you vomit your food, I'll vomit mine," said the younger brother. The elder brother, who had been eating meat, vomited fruit and milk, owing to his skill in magical tricks. The younger brother, who had been eating fruit and milk, vomited meat, thanks to the magic of his brother. They parted. The elder brother went up and settled upon Raṅgaswami Peak; the younger brother settled down at Kāraimaḍai (Irula Kāremëḍe).[5]

Two Irulas went to collect grass for broomsticks on the slope of Rangaswami Mountain. In the night, a deity appeared to them in their dreams and said, "Come up here and worship me under this tree!" In the morning they climbed up and saw a deity in the shape of a large flat stone seated under a lime tree (*imbimara*; another version speaks of a *koṭṭamara*). It was the elder brother who thus became the deity called Nīlagiritoga.

An *iṭaiyaṉ* [cowherd] was grazing his cows properly, but one of them did not give him any milk; therefore he followed it and found out that it was milking itself over an ant hill under a *kāre*-tree. Enraged, he kicked and slashed the ant hill with his foot and his machete but, to his horror, found out that the stone was bleeding. In his sleep, he had a dream in which god Raṅga appeared to him as the younger brother of the two original brothers and demanded to be worshipped in the Kāraimaḍai temple[6] as the younger brother and on the peak of Raṅgaswami as the elder brother.

What is this myth's meaning? The issue in all versions of the myth — and there are more — is 'vegetarian' versus 'nonvegetarian' food.

Significantly, the elder brother is a meat-eater and due to his proficiency in magic he tricks[7] his vegetarian younger brother and establishes himself as the tribal deity to be worshipped on the most prestigious spot of the Nilgiris, the sacred Rangaswami Mountain. On the other hand, the younger brother, a vegetarian, is established in ritually clean places of Āgamic, Hindu worship — in the Brahminic temples of the plains.

Thus Raṅga in his different manifestations has three seats: Rangaswami Mountain; the temple at Kāraimaḍai, nowadays administered by Shri Vaishnava Brahmins (whereas the *pūjāri* on Rangaswami Peak is an Irula); and in Yelandur Taluk (Mysore District, Karnataka State). In this last place, the god's seat is a huge white (*beḷi, biḷi*) rock (nearly 400 feet high) called Biḷigiri in the Biligiri-Rangana Hills. There is a Hindu temple, quite old, certainly deeply medieval; the deity is particularly sacred to the Shōlega tribals. In fact, they regard him as their *bhava* [sister's husband] for he had eloped with a Shōlega girl called Kusumale, their 'sister,' and married her. In ancient times, so the Shōlegas believe, the god Raṅga was visible to human beings. At that time, a man called Bommegauḍa of the Teneru clan of the Shōlega tribe was living in a hilly place called Guruvina Hajar situated opposite the present temple. He had seven daughters, and the youngest among them, Kusumale, was unmarried and the most beautiful. The god fell in love with Kusumale. One night when Raṅganāyakkamma, the god's divine consort, was asleep, he transformed night into day so that Kusumale would go to fetch water. The god, dressed as a Shōlega, with an ax on his shoulder, appeared before her and told her of his passion. Finally he made her marry him on the spot, and since then he has become the brother-in-law of all Shōlegas. In due course, Raṅga is said to have 'hidden' Kusumale in his own divine self (Balakrishna 1953; Morab 1977:61).

The demon priest of Garkiyur has provided me with a few interesting points concerning Raṅga, which manifest well the blend of tribal views with Hindu Vaishnavism. God Raṅga is supposed to be an *avatāra* [divine incarnation] of Kṛṣṇa (these were the very words the enthusiastic and well-educated priest used). However, his mother was an Irula goddess — Gōppamma who is, in point of fact, the mother (*aggwe*) of *all* Raṅgas — the Nīlagiriranga, alias Raṅgarāmä (i.e., the Raṅga of Rangaswami Peak), of Kāremëḍeranṅga and of Biḷigiri Raṅga! It was even more interesting to learn that Nīlagiriraṅga and all other Raṅgas have only a mother, no father (like Mādappa in the Ūrāḷi central myth and, in fact, like the pre-Aryan Tamil Murugan the son of goddess Koṟṟavai who, too, is 'fatherless'). Finally, the first *pūjā* is always done for her, the goddess Gōppamma. When I expressed my surprise and delight at this, the Irula *pūjāri* stressed the fact that in Irula *sampradāya* [tradition] it is always the woman, the goddess, who is ultimately the most important manifestation of the sacred; and he quoted, as a telling example, Būman Tāyi, i.e., 'Mother Earth,' who must be worshipped and propitiated before any agricultural operation, even small-scale gardening. He spoke with such fervor and depth and intelligence as to bring to mind Goethe's "*das ewig weibliche*..." But to return to Raṅga.

As already noticed above, Rangaswami the god is said to have come to the Nilgiris from Mysore, from his town, the historically well-known Sīraṅgapaṭṭanam (battle at Seringapattam in 1799 when the famous Sultan Tippu was killed by the British). We may well ask whence had the Vaishnava worship of Raṅganātha — that very particular manifestation of

Viṣṇu — spread among some of the Nilgiri tribes, for it is quite obvious that it is relatively recent and superficial. This Hinduization of the tribes like the Irulas, Ūrāḷis, and Shōlegas has been there definitely for the last 150 years and apparently longer; nevertheless, the Vaishnava-Saiva syncretic blend is neither thorough nor deep and has certainly not penetrated into the core of the tribal religion. It probably spread to the Nilgiris from the former Mysore State since Vaishnavism, in particular, flourished there, and it was carried among the tribes with the migration of the plainspeople in late and early modern times. Another possibility, more remote, is that it spread from Kerala, with its particular worship of Kṛṣṇa.

Among the goddesses, the *ammās*, the one who is regarded as most powerful and whose worship is universal among Nilgiri tribal (as well as nontribal) peoples, is Masaṇi (Masiṇi). Her small but important temple in Masaṇiguḍi, on the lower northern slopes of the Nilgiris, is considered a very sacred place. She is mainly the goddess of cholera and other diseases and is very popular among the inhabitants of Southern Mysore as well.

The fourth layer of tribal worship is represented by semi-divine beings who are usually of vicious nature and have to be propitiated. This strata of worship — next to that of the *toga* [tribal deities proper] and the worship of some animals and objects — is the most central and most vigorous layer of Irula religion. There are a host of goblins, ghosts, vampires, and demons, all very much alive in the tribal lore. Among them, *gōḷus* are probably the most colorful: they 'grow' on trees, like some huge dangerous fruit, and devour people.[8] The related *būdam*[9] is a giant and evil ghost, and the various *münis*, or *munis*, are voracious, cannibalistic demons, who are often quite stupid.

P. Sivaraj told me that in Garkiyur, on the eastern slopes of Rangaswami Peak, was a famous Irula *pēguḍi*, the shrine of a *pē*, *pēy* [demon, devil], and that its priest, too, is a well-known *būjāri*, willing to part with his knowledge. Hence, one day in late February of 1981, I set out to visit the place.

The *pēyguḍi* in Garkiyur is situated on a cliff over a ravine, its door opening toward the slope of Rangaswami Peak. The shrine is attended by a relatively young priest by the name of Badirän (cf. Sanskrit *bhadra* 'auspicious, good'), a strong, energetic man who proved to be an enthusiastic informant. His office was hereditary, and he learned his know-how in the traditional manner from his father, who had trained him from boyhood.

First I was naturally interested in the essential features of the deity worshipped in the *guḍi*. It was defined as a *pē* or *pēy*[10] in female shape (*poṇṇ' uruvu*) roaming mostly freely around. Throughout the year, it is taken care of by the *būjāri* Badirän, who offers it bath water, incense sticks, and flowers at the *guḍi*, which — to quote a charming comparison offered by Sivaraj — is like a 'traveler's bungalow' for it, or rather her. Once a year, the demoness is invited by the priest to come and occupy the temple and its sacred compounds fully for a whole month. It is strictly forbidden to open the temple 'for the public' any other time than that. If this would happen, the *pēy* would kill someone in the jungle, or even in his field or garden.

What is the difference between a *pē* and a *toga*? *"Pē vēṛe, toga vēṛe,"* shouted Badirän. The two are entirely different." Whereas the *toga* is of one form, always present, beneficial, and may be worshipped by everyone, *pē* is almost always a female, a *kanni* [virgin] without a man, and something

that can take different forms (in Badirän's words, *mūṇḍu nālu uruvu da* "three or four shapes, certainly"). It can be 'represented' only once a year in the big *abba* [feast], and it may be worshipped only by one person, its *būjāri* — the shaman, the ritual specialist. The worship of the *pē* is dangerous and a "big job," as we shall see below.

Who is more powerful, the *pēy* or a *kūretoga* [domestic house-god]? A difficult question indeed. After some hesitation, the answer came: "One should not say. But the *kūretoga* is more important. However, the *pē* of Garkiyur, she is very powerful!"

How does Badirän know how she looks? And how does he invite her to come, and from where?

She comes to the *būjāri* in his dreams. She has different shapes, but she is always a female, terrible to behold. He invites her by singing the *pēpāṭṭu* [demon song], which calls her away from the mountains (*bōli*), and she comes (*pē vargudu*) and settles down in the temple.

With much trepidation and not much hope, I asked if he could sing the *pēpāṭṭu* so that I could tape record it. To my amazement, he did — they did; it was a chorus sung by a group of men, and there was nothing terrifying in the song in which the demoness is invited to a tasty feast.[11]

mmmm . . . ēla vadaṇe kāyiyō eḷāngā
aḍigē eḷāngā pūje
pacce pāgara kāyiyō eḷāngā aḍigē eḷāngā pūje
cakke kāyiyō eḷāngā aḍigē eḷāngā pūje
nīla vadaṇe kāyiyō eḷāngā aḍigē eḷāngā pūje
vāe kākiyō eḷāngā aḍigē eḷāngā pūje
nalla pāgara kāyiyō eḷāngā aḍigē eḷāngā pūjē

I shall mix and cook the fruit of the
eggplant[12] for the *pūjā*
I shall mix and cook the fresh balsam pear[13]
for the *pūjā*
I shall mix and cook the jack-fruit for the *pūjā*
I shall mix and cook the blue eggplant for the
*pūjā*
I shall mix and cook the banana-fruit for the
*pūjā*
I shall mix and cook the good balsam pear for
the *pūjā*

The temple itself is a rectangular structure within a stone enclosure called *kĕṭṭĕḍa*. At the entrance to the enclosure are two slab stones and two pruned *kiḷiya*-trees. Some more trees of the same variety stand inside the enclosure. In the left front courtyard corner is the large round stone (*guṇḍakallu*), which must be lifted by the priest during the festival. This heavy stone must also be lifted by a bridegroom to prove his ability to perform as a good husband, or by any man to prove his prowess and strength (*balä*). The lifting of a heavy stone for similar purposes used to be current also among the Todas. Toda villages may still contain such a stone, but today nobody seems to be able to lift it alone. The *būjāri* of Garkiyur did lift the stone specifically for us.

The lifting of a heavy stone for various purposes, mainly to prove one's manliness and strength before obtaining a bride, is certainly not a specific feature of the Nilgiri tribals. It pertains to South Indian culture in general.

Interestingly enough, it is the subject of a modern Tamil short story by the well-known writer N. Parthasarathy called "The Bridegroom's Stone," from his collection *Summer Flowers* (Madras, 1961): Driven by a strong desire to marry a girl from a neighboring village, a Maṟavar youth successfully passes three tests required by an outside rival. He lifts a heavy stone, dances while carrying three pots of milk on his head without spilling a drop, and presses the oil out of a small quantity of gingelly seeds with his bare hands. The hero's uncle considers these tests anachronistic and manages to abolish them after his nephew had successfully passed them.

The site of the shrine must have been sacred since time immemorial, although the sanctuary itself, as it stands now, was built approximately 50 to 70 years ago. It is a one-room building with white-washed mud walls, tiled roof, veranda, and wooden pillars embellished with simple carvings, all built by the Irulas themselves. In the walls are niches for lamps (*dīpas*). The enclosed space is sacred; one must take one's shoes off. Within the place, dance may be performed, but fire must not be made there; fire remains were visible outside, in front of the enclosure.

I was allowed to take pictures and make sketches, but the *guḍi* itself (which had no windows) was not made open to me so that I do not know what — if anything — is inside. It may be opened only once a year, during the great festival (*abba*) in October-November. In this month of Kārttikai, the demoness is invited to come, and she enters and occupies the *guḍi* for a whole month. However, before she is invited, certain conditions must be fulfilled. One is absolute cleanliness of the priest and the shrine. Everything must be swept clean, washed, and adorned with *ubbaṭṭi* (the summary Irula term for sacred ash, red kunkum, and sandlewood powder). The *būjāri* must wear a special piece of cloth (*cīle*), which is called *kāvicile* or *kanapecile* (also *manjacile*), of red or reddish color. This cloth, worn regularly over the left shoulder (like an *angavastiram* 'towel'), may be tied around the head (then it is termed *urumbele* 'turban') at certain times, such as when lifting the heavy round stone. In critical ritual situations, the priest will tie the red cloth around his mouth (see Fig. 31). His dhoti is then in the *picoge* fashion, the 'short' Brahminic manner (*vīrakacai*); the chest is made bare, as are the feet. When tied around the mouth, the red cloth is termed *vāypāvāḍe*.

On auspicious days during the Kārttikai month, the great yearly festival and worship are arranged for the demoness of the temple; it is structured as follows:

**First day** (usually a Tuesday). The invitation is made by repeated singing of the *pēpāṭṭu* performed under certain conditions. Objects for worship are gathered and prepared.

**Second day.** A vegetarian *pūjā* is made in which the demoness receives what she was promised on the previous day. There must be at least 101 objects (called *oḍe*, literally, 'possessions') gathered as offerings to begin the *pūjā*. They include ripe (*pammu*) and unripe (*kāyi*) fruits, incense sticks (*baṭṭi*), lumps of camphor (*kalpuram*), and flowers. The vegetarian *pūjā*, which is modeled on a simplified temple worship on Hindu Āgamic rite, begins with the tying of a *kole* [bunch, cluster] of *vāpammu* [bananas].

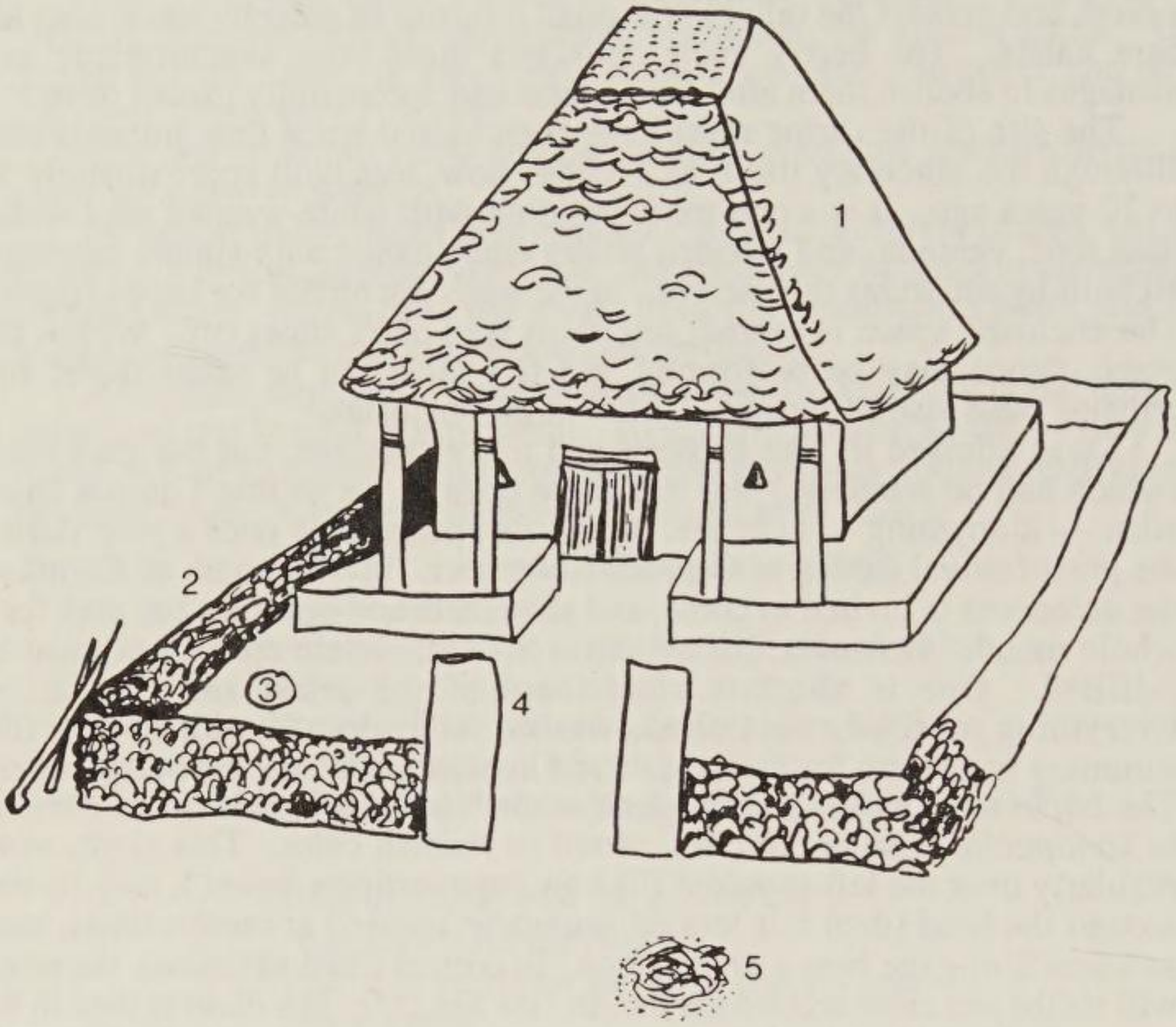



Fig. 30: The *pēyguḍi* of Garkiyur

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 shrine building (mud walls, tiled roof, veranda, closed door) | 3 test stone (*kallu*) |
| 2 stone fence | 4 stone slabs |
| | 5 fire remnants |

Fig. 31: Badirän, the *būjāri* of Garkiyur (1981)

**Third day.** This is the most interesting ceremony because it is a non-Hindu tribal ritual: a non-vegetarian sacrifice preceded by a ceremonial hunt of the huge sambar deer. First, the women of the village sing the following song addressed to the *pēy*:

rattakkëṟu poṇṇē
kaiyēṟa cāmipoṇṇē
kaivïḍu cāmipoṇṇē
rattakkëṟu poṇṇē
kaivïḍu cāmipoṇṇē

O woman (i.e., the demoness) who receive
blood as alms
O woman-deity who are being paid [by us]
O divine woman who [may] forsake [us]
O woman who receive blood as alms
O divine woman who [may] forsake [us]

While the women are singing, the priest takes a large bent knife (*koḍavekatti* 'billhook'), sharpens it, and then leads a party of young men to the hunt (*vēṭṭe*). They go to the forest and trace and kill a large sambar deer (*kaḍame*). Badirän specified that it indeed should be a 'large animal' (*beliya vēṇḍu*).[14] The deer is brought to the *guḍi* as offering, certain parts are offered to the deity, and the rest is distributed to the whole village. The feasting, singing, and dancing last for three days.

The structure of *any* Irula worship (*būjä* < Skt. *pūjā-*) is a tripartite event spread over two to three days. Usually the three parts are a procession, the worship proper, and a feast accompanied by song and dance.

On the first day, the Irulas go in procession around the village, with the music of oboes, flutes, and drums. The worship proper is performed on the sacred place, which is either a structural *guḍi* 'shrine' in the jungle near the village, or any other sacred complex (trees with flat stones, rocks, a waterpool, an ant hill). In cases where the deities are represented by flat erected stones, the following arrangements are possible:

1. A large single flat stone (*kallu*) considered to be an image, an idol (*cele*) of the deity to which nonbloody sacrifices are offered. This arrangement is rare; the following one is much more frequent.

2. A larger stone beside a smaller one, where the large stone (*cele*) represents the *toga* [deity] proper and the smaller stone is called *gāvutoga* (*gāvu* 'bloody sacrifice'). Blood (*netaru*) is applied only to the top of the smaller stone, never to the proper (larger) sacred stone.

3. A larger stone with one smaller stone on each side may represent, for example, the male god (in the middle) with two spouses; or the male god with his spouse on the right side and a *gāvu* on the left; or a main central female god and her sister deities; or a main central male god and his sisters.

It is considered a good sign, an auspicious omen, if a cobra (called in such case *cāmi* 'the lord, the master') resides in an ant hill or near the sacred stones or in a *guḍi*.

Some deities require special worship, e.g., Māri (the goddess of small-pox, cholera, and other scourges), whose worship is called *puṭṭu pammu poruka māri*. The *puṭṭu* [sacrificial food] is prepared from two kinds of millet, *pāṇḍi* (*Panicum italicum*) and *kamba* (*Panicum spicatum*). Next day, three categories of women must bathe and prepare themselves for worship: small girls before puberty, girls after puberty who are still virgins, and grown-up women who are, at the moment, without husbands. They take the *puṭṭu*, bananas, and coconuts, put them on plates, and bring them to the shrine of Māri. The *pūjā* then follows. The officiant will insert five small sticks into the *puṭṭu*; on each stick will be seven betel leaves representing the seven Irula clans (*ōḷu kula*) on behalf of which the *pūjā* for the goddess is performed.

There are also special types of occasional worship, e.g., for the goddess Masaṇi (Masaṇitāyi of Vāgapeṇe) and for the arrival of rains (worship of Māri). Often a bloody animal sacrifice of cocks, sheep, or goats is still arranged.

When a cock (*kōyi*) is used as a sacrificial animal, its throat is cut; when a goat or sheep is killed in sacrifice, its head is chopped off (cf. Irula *kōyi aṛu*, literally, 'to cut the cock'; *āḍu vĕṭṭu*, literally, 'to chop off the goat'). The body is then turned over to the owner of the animal, who usually offers it to be cooked for the use of all, but the head is used in worship in the shrine.

A most interesting phenomenon, specific to tribal and semi-tribal religiosity, is the possession by a deity of a person who for some reason is chosen or who lets himself or herself be possessed. It is important to notice that *any* member of the tribe can be possessed, while the worship proper and the sacrifice is the domain of the ritual specialist.

*Jāya* [induced possession][15] is performed when the Irulas need divine guidance and help to solve a personal or public problem — whenever they want to obtain any assistance from the deity. The process is termed *toga ugādu* 'inviting god [to descend and possess]' or *jāya*. The whole procedure evolves in four stages.

First, the *pūjā* is performed. Plantains, coconuts, etc., are arranged on a plate, and a bell is rung. Incense is burned, and then the *būjāri* waves it in three rounds. He then breaks and offers the coconut, and the assembled people prostrate themselves and implore the *toga* to come.

Next, the trance is induced by drumming, swaying, and singing the *dua uga pāṭṭu*, or 'deity-inviting song,' of which I have a tape recorded specimen.[16] It goes like this:

lē lē lā lā lō la dumbiyānē
lē lē lā lā lā lanē dumbiyānē
hey hi hey hi lē lō lā dumbiyānē
hēy hi hey hi kwāk vā
edō da nalladō kĕṭṭadō

The word *dumbiyānē* means 'oh one [who comes riding] the *dumbi/tumbi*'[17] (i.e., a bee, dragonfly, large black bee, large black beetle), so named because the deity is imagined to come (*cāmi vargudu* 'the Lord comes') riding the *dumbi*-bee. This is of absorbing interest since it provides a connection between Irula and Old Tamil culture. *Tumpi* 'dragonfly' in Old Tamil texts is an insect that is supposed to have four senses; its drone resembles the music of a lute (Old Tamil *yāḻ*), and it is

imagined to be the envoy sent by the beloved to her lover. It occurs frequently in the earliest poetic texts of Tamil from two thousand years ago — and also in Toda songs.

The deity then enters the heart (*īruvatte*) of the possessed person (termed *jāyakārä*), which trembles *gïḍigïḍigïḍigïḍigïḍi* in an increased heartbeat rate, and it changes (*māṛi*) his mind (*gëṇa*) so that it can speak through the possessed person, usually uttering not more than a few words in a language that is not always quite intelligible.[18] The last line in the above-quoted song means "what indeed is right and what is not right," asking for a decision and the courses of action to be taken. The *jāyakārä* through whose mouth (*vāyili*) the *toga* speaks, will usually give an answer to this question.

When the divine verdict is given, stage four follows: the deity asks that certain things be offered to it, such as a spear, bell, or plate — all temple utensils. The man or the community on whose behalf the *jāya* was performed must present the object(s) to the god (i.e., to the *guḍi*) within the next eight to ten days. The objects are presented in the following manner: they should not be shown to anyone but should be hidden some place in the forest. Then the donor tells the deity that he has presented the objects and asks the god to accept the gift. The *jāyakārä* then enters into another trance, rushes to the particular spot, finds the objects, and brings them to the village. Another *pūjā* is performed after the *jāyakārä* has brought the donation; the gift is then presented to the deity and kept in the temple afterwards.

Fortunately, I witnessed a genuine possession in Gundri on March 2, 1978. An Ūrāḷi named Cellappa Ārva (a Catholic, but deep inside still very much under the spell of tribal religion and lore) became possessed spontaneously while a group of informants discussed with us old tribal lore and customs. Apart from our team, three or four Franciscan sisters from the convent were present, as were four Ūrāḷi informants. The person in question was sitting on a chair, listening. Suddenly his breathing became quick and heavy, his head shook vigorously, he made a few inarticulate noises, his eyeballs turned up, and then in a rather vigorous, throaty voice (certainly not his own) he shouted a sentence in an odd Irula-like language. After that he fell from the chair on the floor — apparently in a swoon that lasted at the most one minute — was helped back onto the chair, sat quietly as if nothing had happened, and remembered nothing. During the event, the other Ūrāḷis present remained in awed silence, and for a while afterwards they whispered. Then the most friendly and bold among them — a very intelligent informant named Rāyappan — offered an explanation. It was goddess Gānjanūru Masaṇi who had spoken through the man. The message was in Ūrāḷi, but somewhat different and archaic. It said, "You speak of events of ancient times. Why do you say those things? What comes to you out of it? You should not speak now!"[19] Notwithstanding this warning of the goddess, the same informant related on the next day the very complex Ūrāḷi myth of Mādēšūrsāmi and Kārayyan, narrated in the following chapter.

# Notes

[1] During this trip I was also working on an Irula dictionary. For my research in Irula religion, two circumstances were of utmost importance: thorough discussions of the matter with P. Sivaraj and a visit to the village of Garkiyur with its *pēguḍi* 'devil shrine.'

[2] I.e., goddess Pārvatī and her husband Paramaśiva, always quoted as a pair, almost always with Pārvatī coming first — a well-known supreme divine pair of Hindu Saivism.

[3] Etymology is uncertain, but may be connected with Tamil *toḷukai*, Malayalam *toḷuka* 'to worship, worshipping,' etc.

[4] Mahādeśvara is a popular deity in southern parts of Karnataka and is worshipped as a family deity by various Hindu casts of the area. His worship may have spread among the tribes from that area. It is probably significant that the Shōlegas who live in the borderland between Karnataka and Tamilnadu present a very similar religious picture: like the Irulas they, too, worship Rangaswami and Madeswar, cf. S. G. Morab, *The Soliga of Biligiri Rangana Hills* (Calcutta, 1977).

[5] According to other versions, the elder brother (*aiya, aṇṇä*) went to Malleśvara Peak (Vëṭṭe Kāḍu versions). Yet another version says that Raṅganādar had a brother-in-law, Nanjappa. They quarreled on account of what they had eaten, Raṅganādar having eaten meat curry, and Nanjappa fruit and milk. When vomiting the food, Raṅga vomited fruit and milk, and Nanjappa, mutton curry. That is why Nanjappa is worshipped in the temple at Nanjanagode in Mysore and Raṅga by the Irulas on Raṅgaboṭṭu.

[6] Raṅganātha has two consorts; the more important one is called Raṅgammāboṭṭu, i.e., 'The Raṅgammā Hill.'

[7] Such a trick is certainly not considered 'dirty' in the Hindu and tribal moral code; it is proof of the elder brother's shrewdness and magical skill, which should be admired.

[8] Cf. the *vetāla-* of Sanskritic lore — vampires and ghosts that hang on trees or take possession of dead bodies.

[9] I.e., Skt. *bhūta-* 'spirit, demon, goblin,' mostly the ghost of a person who died violently.

[10] Cf. Tamil *pēy*. The word may be reconstructed as a Dravidian root **pēy/*pēc/*pēh*, and the concept of both male and female *pēys* occurs in the

earliest Tamil literature. Cf. H. W. Haussig, *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, I. Abteilung, 18. Lieferung (Stuttgart, 1982), s.v. "*pēy*."

[11] I found out from the subsequent discussion that although the song was perfectly genuine and correct, the circumstances were not — that is, certain magic *mantras* [formulas] and *mudrās* [gestures], as well as overall ritual circumstances, were absent so that the song could not be effective and was thus, in fact, a simulation. Hence there was no hesitation to sing it.

[12] Cf. Kannaḍa *badaṇe* (brinjal, eggplant *Solanum melongena*).

[13] *Momordica charantia*; cf. Ālu Kuṟumba *pāgara*.

[14] For the term *vēṇḍu*, cf. Zvelebil 1979c, *The Irula Language, Part II*, item 604; probably it specifically means 'hunt-animal' and is connected with the word for hunting (*vōṭṭe, vēṭṭe*).

[15] The term *jāya* is so far without etymology but occurs also in Ālu Kuṟumba language.

[16] March 17, 1978, by the *pūjāri* of Rangaswami Peak residing at Kalampalaiyam.

[17] Cf. Kota *tib*, Toda *tüby*.

[18] According to one informant (P. Sivaraj), the *jāyakārä*, when possessed, speaks in *okkilanāya*, i.e., Kannaḍa. This may be true of some cases but is certainly not universal. Rather, according to the information gathered from other sources, informants, and my own observation, the genuinely possessed person speaks in an archaic form of Irula.

[19] The whole event is fully recorded on my tape of that day.

# 10

# Myths

The most precious result of my entire fieldwork among the Nilgiri tribes — apart from my identification of Ūrāḷis as an Irula-speaking tribe and the basic description of Irula linguistic structure and vocabulary — are two tribal myths, genuine pieces of sacred tribal lore: the great central Ūrāḷi myth and the creation story of Mele Nāḍu Irulas.

I have given the great central Ūrāḷi myth — an amazing, complex story replete with legendary and mythic motifs and dramatic events — such a lofty title since it is indeed awe-inspiring and moving. It is thrilling, too, that the well-known ethnographers Thurston and Rangachari published a very similar myth in their monumental work on the castes and tribes of South India (1909:379-81), while about seventy years later, I heard and tape recorded a much more elaborate and interesting version as told by an Ūrāḷi informant possessed by a goddess.[1]

The deity Mādēšūrsāmi[2] wished to incarnate in order to destroy the demon Savaṇa,[3] who enslaved the gods. He chose a queen's womb, but she had an abortion and gave birth to a stillborn baby boy. Therefore he chose goddess Puttammādēvi, the Mother Goddess of the Ant Hill,[4] who was a virgin, and the baby boy was born from her split back, thus causing her death.[5] The child had no one — no father or mother — to give him a name. He went searching for someone to take care of him, until he found an ascetic called Aynūru, who lived in a cave with his twelve disciples. The boy joined them. To honor his *guru*, he caught frogs, snakes, and various insects, and changing them magically into the most beautiful flowers, he brought them to Aynūru. One day Aynūru followed him, and seeing the magic transformation, he recognized a god in the boy. He at once wanted to place him on the seat of honor and worship him, but the boy refused. An argument followed, and during this quarrel, Aynūru, who was obviously short tempered, shouted, "All right, since you are like this, go away, you

tricky Ma[hā]dēva!" Thus the divine boy got his name — Mādēva alias Mādappa.[6]

Thereafter, Mādappa (alias Mādēšūrsāmi) went in search of the gods but could not find them. On his way he met the first Ūrāḷi pair, Nijagante and his wife Nīla Cōlagatti. They had no children. "If you will let me have your first-born son," said Mādappa, "I'll give you the boon of children." They agreed, and the two boys were born from the womb of Nīla Cōlagatti — Kārayya and Billayya.[7]

In the meantime, gods were enslaved by the evil Savaṇa for whom they had to work like serfs. Mādēšūrsāmi saw them and was worried. Savaṇa, too, noticed him and asked, "Who is this youngster?" "Mādappa," said the gods. "So you're a shoemaker?" asked Savaṇa. "Yes, I'm a *mādari* [cobbler]," answered Mādappa. "How long will it take for you to make for me a pair of beautiful sandals?" "Three months," said Lord Mādappa. He went to the Lac Mountain and took red lac, to the Red Bead Mountain and took red beads. And as he was exerting himself, the ancestor of the Mādagas was born from the sweat of his left hand, and from the sweat of his right hand, the ancestor of the Pariahs. From the rib bone of the Mādaga, Mādappa then created a woman; turning the man and the woman several times around, he made them into husband and wife. Then he asked them to assemble the sandals for Savaṇa. As they had no leather, he ordered the Mādaga to skin his wife to thus obtain the leather for the sandals. This done, the Mādaga [cobbler] made the sandals, pressed in all the lac and the red beads, and gave them to Lord Mādappa. The Lord then placed an embroidered cloth on the woman, who at once healed and became very beautiful. He took the sandals and went away.

On his way he met the Wind and asked him to blow a large flat slippery rock entirely clean. Then he asked his friend Fire to heat the rock so that it would burn. This accomplished, he invited Savaṇa to come and try out the sandals. All the deities also came, and as they looked on, Savaṇa put on the new shoes, the lac melted away, the red beads became hot and slippery, and Savaṇa was almost helpless on the heated polished rock. At that moment, Mādappa attacked him. However, Savaṇa fought furiously, and Mādappa almost lost the battle. Fortunately, Lord Māyavar from Above let down one of his feet, and the foot finally crushed Savaṇa. The gods were free. They ran to various mountains, and there they were changed to rocks and stones. Since then, they are worshipped in that shape.

Mādēšūrsāmi then went to claim the first-born boy; however, the parents gave him Billayya, their second son. Mādappa went from place to place, searching for rest, and Billayya followed him everywhere. Tired of this, Mādappa went to the parents and took Kārayya. Together they went to a place called Gaḍḍecāmi with the Kārayan Mountain, and there Mādappa caught a bison and gave it to Kārayya to graze and milk like a tame buffalo. After some time, the presence of Kārayya, who was a mere silly mortal, became too much for the Lord Mādappa. So, he sent Kārayya to fetch him some honey, and while Kārayya was searching for it, Mādappa hid himself. But Kārayya found him and wished to stay with him. Therefore, Mādappa said, "Look, friend, the honey which you brought me is not fit for me. There is a rock there, go and fetch me the honey which you find there!" "But I do not have any tool to descend down along the rock," objected Kārayya. Therefore, Mādappa cut a large bamboo, split it, made a hanging ladder (*māl*) out of it, tied it to his thigh, and ordered Kārayya to climb down. Kārayya took a gourd, placed it into his armpit, and climbed down

the ladder shouting "Mādappa, Mādappa," to chase away the dangerous bees. When he cut the honeycomb, he decided first to offer some of the honey to the deities of the rock (for protection), but as he did it, some of the honey slid down his hand, and Kārayya licked it. Mādappa, seeing this from above, got very angry, as Kārayya's licking off the honey polluted the whole; so he loosened the ladder and let Kārayya fall. But the grateful deities of the rock caught and saved him. Not only that, they blessed him with a power equal to that of Mādēšūrsāmi. Kārayya climbed up, took a heavy knife, and went after Mādappa, who hid himself in the Māṇicikām Hill. Kārayya followed him. The god again escaped, hiding among the hills, and finally disappeared in a steppe of high grass. But Kārayya, in hot pursuit, cut down all the grass, shouting, "Do not hide from me, Lord Mādappa! Am I not yours?" Mādappa hid in an ant hill, and Kārayya could not find him. Then one day he saw a milch-cow milking herself over the ant hill. He understood. He brought sheep to that particular place, and forced them to stay there and pollute the whole place by urinating and defecating over the ant hill. This Mādēšūrsāmi could not endure. He came out, and Kārayya hit his head with his knife. But Mādappa said, "Let always the first *pūjā* be yours, and let me be worshipped only afterwards. Please, forgive me." The two made peace and established themselves there. Since then, the Ūrāḷis worship first their hero and ancestor Kārayya, and only then their god Mādappa.

What is the basic significance of this magnificent myth? It is an all-comprehensive, complex myth with several layers. On one level, it may symbolize the victory of the Vīraśaivas (represented by Mādēšūrsāmi, who as Madheswara is considered the ancestor the the Liṅgāyats in the Thurston-Rangachari version) over the Jains (represented by Savaṇa). However, this — if indeed it is so — would be only the 'latest' and most superficial layer. Much more important is the layer of the myth that deals with Mādappa — a demitribal god born from the virgin — as connected with the very low caste of the Mādigas, whom he created. A tie connects the Ūrāḷis and the Shōlegas, both tribal, with the Mādigas and the Pariahs, who are today the lowest strata of Hindu society but who may also be regarded as almost "demitribal" and probably as having been "tribal" once, too.[8]

Thus, in Mādappa of the Ūrāḷi-Shōlega myth, we encounter a syncretistic deity that belongs to both the sphere of tribal/demitribal strata of South Indian population and to the sphere of orthodox and unorthodox Sanskritic 'Great Tradition' (Vīraśaiva, Saiva). I have hardly any doubt the Mādappa is indeed a male counterpart of Mādamma, the goddess of the Mādigas (also called Mātaṅgi) and, at the same time, a god of the Ūrāḷis and the Shōlegas. Observe, however, that in spite of his divine origin and nature, and his heroic act of destroying Savaṇa, he is, in the end, overcome by the Ūrāḷi-Shōlega (tribal) ancestral hero Kārayya. But he not only destroys, he also creates: from the sweat of his hands he creates the first Mādiga (and, subsequently, his wife, in a manner that might have been influenced by the Book of Genesis) and the first Pariah. He also teaches Kārayya how to tame and milk wild buffaloes and how to gather honey with the help of a ladder. Thus, he is indeed the creator, though not of the tribal Ūrāḷis and Shōlegas, and the teacher; however, he is also too much of a god to be constantly in the company of a man, even if the man is a tribal hero (or precisely because the man is a tribal hero?). Thus we get the motif of the god's elusiveness and wrong-doing and the oddly moving motif of the man

in pursuit of his god, a pursuit in anger and longing: Kārayya hunting down Mādappa.

We do not know who is, in fact, Aynūru: he is the oddest and most nebulous personality of all, absent in the Thurston-Rangachari Shōlega version. He also disappears from the story, and he may be a residue of something deeper and more ancient to which we do not have access at present. In the recorded version of the myth, he seems to play the role of the young god's *guru* and surrogate father (name-giver); thus, he may be a later, secondary acquisition. Almost equally nebulous, but more important, is Māyavar, the deity who, functionally, corresponds to Krishnamurti of the Shōlega version. On analogy with Ālu Kuṟumba religious notions, we may see in him the Lord of the World of Māya (the world of dead ancestors; the Ālu Kuṟumbas' 'paradise' called *māyaⁿ lōka*, a world somewhere in heaven), who appears only in a flash (in agreement with his earlier promise of help) and whose divine foot (a typical Hindu motif) ultimately destroys the evil demon. Among the human figures of the myth, Kārayya is the most important. He is the one sought after and then rejected by Mādappa, and he is the one who overpowers the god and is deified. He is the first of the honey gatherers and the first to tame wild animals. For the Shōlegas, Kārayyasvāmi is the son of the god Mahādeśvarasvāmi, and he is their ancestor by having married a Shōlega girl; therefore they are called Kāramakka, 'the children of Kārayya.'

The core of the story is the victory of Mādappa over Savaṇa after a preparation with the *guru* Aynūru, followed by the god's search for Kārayya, the pursuit of Mādappa by Kārayya, the clash between the two, and the deification of Kārayya. What is now the meaning of this myth?

First of all, it is the Ūrāḷi-Shōlega version of the perennial Indian story about the eternal struggle between the gods and the demons. This motif recurs constantly in Hindu mythology: when, at a critical point, gods and men are enslaved or in danger of destruction, the highest deity intervenes by providing a deliverer who rescues them. The best-known instances that may be quoted are the creations of Skanda-Kārttikeya to destroy Tāraka, of Subrahmaṇya-Murugan to destroy Cūr (Śūrapadma), and of the Rāma *avatāra* to destroy Rāvaṇa. In this case, the deliverer is Mādappa. Secondly, the myth may be a symbol of the victory of the Liṅgāyats (Vīrasaivas) over the Jains. On the tribal level, the myth functions as legitimation and justification of a number of phenomena in the socioreligious structures of the Ūrāḷis and Shōlegas. It explains the origin of the lowest Hindu communities in the surrounding Hindu society. It also explains the worship of gods as rocks and stones, and connects the 'higher' god Mādēšūrsāmi and the Ūrāḷi culture-hero Kārayya, with the primal female deity, the mother goddess of the ant hill. I consider as very important that fact that the story virtually begins with the ant hill (the incarnation in and birth from the ant hill mother-goddess) and ends with the ant hill (when Mādappa in his anxiety crawls into the 'maternal' ant hill to hide there).

The myth spans a tremendous conceptual space, but we know where it all happened: the rock where Savaṇa was killed is called Savaṇagaḍḍe, in a place called Baggesāl beyond Asur. There is paddy cultivation in its surroundings, but the paddy is reported never to be good because of the curse that lingers over the place.

However, we have not yet finished with Mādēšūrsāmi and Kārayya, for the greatest surprise is still in stock: there is a connection between the myth

of Mādappa and that of Rangaswami. In other words, the Ūrāḷi motif of the brothers Kārayya and Billayya as ancestor heroes of two communities is brought into close connection with the Irula motif of vegetarian versus nonvegetarian brothers in the Raṅga myth. Thus we may speak of the Mahādeśvara-Savaṇa-Kārayya-Billayya-Raṅga mythical complex, covering the area of the borderland between Karnataka and Tamilnadu and common to the tribal complex of the Irulas, Ūrāḷis, and Shōlegas.

The god Mahādeśvarasvāmi (whose effigy is displayed in the Mahādeśvara Temple in the mountains of Yelandur, Kollegal Taluk) visited Nibi Shōlega and, when told that he was out, requested his wife, Sonk Amma, for food. She was naked and declined to come before him. On being provided with clothes, she attended to the god, who blessed her, predicted that she would have children, and told her that her first-born would be his son, Kārayya. This first-born then became the progenitor of the Shōlegas (cf. Luiz 1963).

One day, Mahādeśvara of Kollegal (who is also the god of hunting) was walking in the forest with his two sons, Kārayya and Billayya, when he saw a monitor lizard peeping from an ant hill. Kārayya caught the animal and brought it to his father as food, whereas Billayya stood simply watching it. Seeing their behavior, Lord Mahādeśvara made Billayya settle down in the plains and live upon a vegetarian diet, while Kārayya was made to live in the jungles and hunt animals for food. The descendants of Billayya are vegetarian Liṅgāyats; those of Kārayya are nonvegetarian Shōlegas and other tribals, and Kārayya is worshipped as their ancestor (Balakrishna 1953).

The Mele Nāḍu Irula ancestor myth[9] is probably the most interesting among all the creation myths I have collected. In the beginning of time, Rāma and Sītā took two wild jungle-cats[10] and reared them as their children. The cats — naturally — did not talk, and only the fruits of the magic gooseberry tree could produce human speech in them. With the help of a wise monkey called Rāmanti, Rāma and Sītā found the magic *nelli*-tree, and its fruit transformed the animal noises of the cats into human speech. A gradual transformation of the two cats into human beings followed.

These first humans, the first Irula pair, ate tubers (*nūrekaṅgu* and *rïekaṅgu*), five plants, honey, fruit of two trees,[11] and one kind of grain, *pāṇḍi* [millet]. In a dream, Rāma appeared to the Irulas and told them how to have intercourse. But he first advised them how to obtain the proper shape since they still crawled on all fours, climbing trees and rocks. The man first shaped himself, then he shaped the woman: he beat and pressed her two sides, thus creating her waist, and as he squeezed in the middle, her breasts and hips and buttocks bulged out; he also pressed with his hands so that he formed the cavities around the collar bones and her neck, and she was well-shaped and handsome.

In the meantime, Rāma and Sītā also created the first two Shōlegas who lived in wet and rainy regions. They were so ugly that the Irulas wanted to live as far away from them as possible. Also, because of the Shōlegas, the first Irulas could not have intercourse; the sexual appetite of the Irulas disappeared as the consequence of the voyeurism of the repulsive Shōlegas. Therefore Rāma came and made the Irulas very small, stood them in front of an ant hill, and told them to crawl through it. And they crawled through it to the other side, and when they emerged, they again had their proper size, but the Shōlegas were left behind and the ant hill became the border-sign between the Irulas and the Shōlegas.

Then the first Irula pair had intercourse. Afterwards, Rāma and Sītā came and pinched the woman under her knees; that's why women have cavities there. And Rāma pinched and pinched till blood came out; since then women menstruate from the vagina. He told her that during her periods she must stay away from men and make herself clean; he also told her that she must take a bath after every act of intercourse.

The woman bent her husband's legs and her own; since then they did not have stiff legs; the long claws that they had previously used for climbing and digging had also gradually disappeared.

This couple gave birth to twelve sons and twelve daughters. They were brothers and sisters; therefore Rāma turned them back to back, and again turned them face to face. The twelve boys then chose their twelve wives, and these pairs became the ancestors of the twelve tribes: Irulas, Vēḏas, Todas, Kotas, Kuṟumbas, Paṇiyans, Kāḍu Nāyikas, Pāṇḍiyas, Tamils, Kannaḍigas, Badagas, and Englishmen.

Nearly all human societies that possess a corpus of traditions about their own past possess also a creation/origin myth. The Irulas are no exception and, in fact, possess several origin and ancestor stories.

In the myth outlined above, we are faced with a problem: did Rāma and Sītā 'create' the cats, did they beget them, or did they 'obtain' them from nature? The problem is semantic since the word used (repeatedly) by the informants was *pëṟu* 'to get, obtain; generate, beget' with the reflexive *koḷ* 'for themselves.' If I read the several versions of this story correctly, the two animals were just 'taken, obtained' from nature, after which they were gradually transformed into humans. The nature-culture opposition is resolved through the following steps: acquiring language by eating the fruits of a magic tree, acquiring dress to cover their nakedness, and obtaining proper human shape. In all of these steps toward culture, the deity Rāma is the instigator and teacher.

Only *two* Nilgiri tribes are truly autochthonous and original according to the myth: the Irulas and the Shōlegas. It is clear from other facts (cf. the preceding myth of Mādēšūrsāmi) that there is some special, close relationship between Irula-speaking tribes and the Shōlegas. This problem remains to be worked out by future anthropological studies in the area.

The role of the ant hill is typically important. It divides the Irulas and Shōlegas and thus becomes a symbol of their respective proper territories; in addition, only after crawling through it can the Irulas have proper sexual intercourse. Only then do they lose the last vestiges of their original, natural state and become fully human and 'civilized.'

The Irula couple had twelve sons and daughters. Since they were siblings, something had to be done to avert incest. The incest taboo is illustrated by a well-known motif: turning the man-woman pair back to back and again face to face — i.e., disturbing and transforming the original pattern. Since each pair ceases to be brother and sister, they can become man and wife, and the ancestors of the twelve tribes. My informant Rāmä was not quite certain about the twelve tribes, he could not recall all of them, and those that he could not remember were supplemented by other informants. There are other Mele Nāḍu Irula creation accounts: according to one (P. Sivaraj 1978), Rāma and Sītā created the first Irulas out of dust or ashes; according to another (Dāsa of Kaḷḷampaḷa 1978), the Irulas were created by Dharma from the sweat of his brow and were fostered and taught by a virgin goddess called Vaḷḷiyamman.

A different origin of man, involving the widespread motif of the flood, occurs in the Vëṭṭe Kāḍu myth told by Maṇiya Müppän, 102 years old, at

Mēle Muḷḷi on March 8, 1978. When the universal flood came, the Lord (Pārvatī-Paramaśiva) went to the shore of the sea and found a gourd floating in its waters. In it were two persons, a father and his daughter. Pārvatī-Paramaśiva first knocked at the gourd and then broke it open. "Who are you?" asked the deity. "We're father and daughter." "All right, father, you turn towards the south and you, daughter, towards the north." With this turning, they became man and wife — and that was the origin of the eighteen different communities.

As for the Irulas, though, the Lord created a solitary child in the dark (*ïruṭṭu*) sea, and since this child became the ancestor of the Irulas, they are called the Dark People (*ïruḷar*). "Father," asked the child god, "you have made me alive, but what shall I eat?" So the Lord created goats, cows, and bulls, and in addition, told the boy, "Milk the cows and sow the milk." When the first Irula sowed the milk, it became crop, but the grains were not closed, and milk poured from them; therefore, god closed the grains in the ears of corn; in fact, he closed the grains of all other kinds of crop (millet, paddy, etc.), and since then the Irulas gather and eat it.

Another story, told at Kōyikere on December 12, 1978, includes other well-known motifs, such as why the Irulas are so poor. A long time ago when they were still only hunters, Rāma and Lakşmaṇa came to the Irula forests in a pitiful state. So they took the Irulas along, to provide themselves with game and also with Irula music and song. They had to cross twelve forests. The lazy Irulas, however, fell asleep crossing the second (*ïraṇḍā-vadu*) forest, and therefore Rāma gave them the name 'people of the second [forest].' Then Pārvatī and Paramaśiva appeared, distributing alms. Everyone grabbed what he could. However, the net that the Irulas spread had holes in it, and only one single silver coin remained in it. After that, Paramaśiva offered them the choice between a golden and a silver stick. The Irulas, silly as they were, took the silver stick, and ever since they use the digging stick in their forest work. Finally, Paramaśiva offered them a horse, but they did not know how to ascend it. So they went to find a ladder and a plank, and in the meantime the horse ran away and was gone. Thus all the Irulas "of the second forest" were left with was the digging stick and one single coin.

For comparison — and in contrast, too — I want to tell two Toda mythical accounts that when examined after listening to the Irula myths and stories show one striking feature: they are totally *sui generis* and have nothing to do with Hindu mythology as we know it (whereas Irula legends show some degree of Hinduization). Also, Toda myths seem to be more complex, to have a greater depth, and to be more lofty than Irula legends.

Amanōṛ, the world of the dead, lies to the West. The sun goes there when it sinks in the West, so that when it is dark in the Nilgiris, it is light in Amanōṛ and vice versa. Amanōṛ is presided by god Ŏn who went there after the death of his son Puf, and it is therefore called Ŏnōṛ, in contrast to our world of the living, which is called Ŏkiṩōṛ, the world of goddess Tŏkiṩy. We are, as long as we live, Ŏkiṩyfaṛ, i.e., Tŏkiṩy's crowd, the living people, in contrast to the dead who are called Ŏnbaṛ, Ŏn's crowd. The people of Ŏn are also known as Amatōḷ. At one time, the Todas went freely to and fro between Ŏnōṛ and Ŏkiṩōṛ, but this was stopped owing to the behavior of Kwaṭöw, and since his time only the dead go the Amanōṛ, never to return.

The Amatōḷ live in much the same way as the people of this world; they have their buffaloes, their dairies, and so on. However, as they walk they wear down their legs, and when a man has worn down his legs up to his

knees, Ön sends him back to this world to live another life. No pigs or rats may enter Önōṛ. Dead people travel to Önōṛ by well-defined routes, which are different for members of the two moieties of TōṛӨaṣōḷ and Töwfiɨyōḷ, while the Tōṛōṛōḷ[12] have a separate realm of the dead for their clan.

The dead do not set out for Amanōṛ till after the second funeral. The Todas have two funerals: the first at which the body is burnt and the second and more elaborate ceremony connected with certain relics of the deceased preserved from the first occasion. Both TōṛӨaṣōḷ and Töwfiɨyōḷ journey westward toward the Kundah Range and cross the Kinaṭüɨy [Avalanche] river at the same spot.[13] After the river, they come first to Parpïṣnbem, a hill near the Mōṛ munds, and then to a thicket (Pïṭōḷfiɨ) near the munds. The path for the two divisions then diverges. The TōṛӨaṣōḷ go by a place called Kocaṛ, a flat rock near the Mōṛ munds, while the Töwfiɨyōḷ go by a path leading from Avalanche Bungalow to Avalanche Top. Whenever a Töwfiɨy man passes this spot for the first time, he throws three stones into a cairn. The rock where the dead person throws the stones is called Tifiṇyxaṣ. Similarly, a TōṛӨas man passing Kocaṛ for the first time will throw three stones in the same way. On the top of the hill there is a spot at which every Toda salutes in all directions. The dead persons also have to go via the Kojxōcnbïɨ path through a thicket where they have to prepare gruel.

The two paths meet again at a stone called Nïʒmuṭxaṣ [hot knock stone]. When a dead person reaches this rock he leans against it so that it touches his chest, and thus he forgets love and other attachments. He proceeds to a rock called Poṇyupyxaṣ; there he 'hands over' his diseases to the rock and becomes strong again so that he is sound and vigorous when he reaches Amanōṛ. He also passes a flat rock with ashes (PūӨyaṛ), a pool with gray water (PūӨyxīn), and another flat rock with charcoal, all connected with the Toda funeral.

The dead man then passes a wood or thicket, called Kotyaṛnbïɨ, where he cuts the trees with his knife; when women reach the same thicket, they pound the *waṣk* [grainpounder] burnt at the funeral.

Dead Todas then proceed to a ravine and to a pool called Pufïxī, near Sispara. Across this pool there is a thread bridge, and those who were bad in life fall into the pool and are bitten by leeches or eaten by worms (*puf*). The people who cross the bridge successfully go straight to Amanōṛ, but those who fall are helped out of the pool by the people of PāṛmuṛӨïṛ [crowd of the plain swamp] who belong to all tribes and live on the other side of Pufïrxīn. The people of PāṛmuṛӨïṛ may keep offending Todas in their country for some time. The greater their offense, the longer they are kept; but all, however bad, reach Amanōṛ sooner or later.

The Pufïrxīn (where chiefly the selfish, the jealous and grudging, and those who have committed some offense against the dairy have fallen) has been spoken of as a kind of Toda hell, but it is rather — to use Rivers's words — "a mild variety of Purgatory," and it only means an uncomfortable delay in the journey to the next world.

Men, women, and buffaloes follow the same path.

The myth of Kwaṭöw is one of the most popular Toda mythical stories, and since it is still vigorously alive, I wish to recount it here as a kind of coda.

There was once a man belonging to the Meḷgāṣ clan who married a woman of Konōṣ and took her to Meḷgāṣ. When she became pregnant, he took her to Konōṣ, and on the way back to Meḷgāṣ they passed the place where the funeral ceremonies of Meḷgāṣ took place. They were standing in front of the funeral hut when the man found a *twaṛy* tree, cut a few sticks from it, and brought them to his wife, who stripped the bark from them. While she was thus engaged, the pains of labor came on, and soon after she gave birth to a gourd (*kïm*). Both husband and wife were very much ashamed, and they decided to say that a child had been born but had died. Accordingly they had the first funeral ceremony there, covering the gourd with a *pūtxuḷy* [cloak] so that it was taken to be the body of a child.

First, buffaloes were caught and killed, then the 'corpse' was taken to the burning place where a fire was made and the gourd, still wrapped in the mantle, was put on it. The fire first burnt the cloak, and when it reached the gourd, the gourd burst into pieces. One became a little boy who took a piece of the burnt cloak and flew away in the air to Nēxāṣ; there the parents found him sitting on a tree. When invited by the parents, the child came down and went with them to Meḷgāṣ. (The other piece of the gourd was split into many fragments, some of which shot up with such force that they killed a kite that had come to the funeral.)

On the way to Meḷgāṣ, the parents and the boy met the buffaloes of the Kāṣ *tī* going from Kōn to Enōṭ. It is necessary to point out here that the *tī* is an institution that comprises a herd of sacred buffaloes, one or more dairies (temples), grazing ground, and the dairy-man (*poɬōɬ*) with an assistant. At that time the buffaloes of Meḷgāṣ and Kāṣ used to go with the *tī* buffaloes as far as a place called Irxwīṛfaɬ, where a special custom took place: a Kāṣ man went with the buffaloes, and he wore on his right wrist a golden bracelet called *pïḍiīΘy* — in Rivers's time still kept at Küšu, the mund of the Kāṣ clan, but now lost. There is a special stone at Irxwīṛfaɬ, and it was the duty of the man with the bracelet to sit on this stone and to make the Meḷgāṣ buffaloes pass on the right side, the Kāṣ buffaloes on the left side, and the *tī* buffaloes in the middle. When he had done this, the *poɬōɬ* [priest] prayed at the stone, the buffaloes of Meḷgāṣ and Kāṣ turned back, and the *tī* buffaloes went on to Enōṭ.

Now when our man and his wife saw the buffaloes coming, they waited near the stone, and suddenly the boy laughed. "Why do you laugh?" asked the father, and the boy answered, "I know the *kwaṣm* of the *tī* buffaloes; I also know the *kwaṣm* of the Meḷgāṣ buffaloes — *nāṣiɬṇ naṭiɬṇox*; also I know the *kwaṣm* of the Kāṣ buffaloes — *ïnōṭfīšty ïnōṭfan*. That's why I laughed."

To know the secret 'sacred names' (*kwaṣm*) used only in prayers and songs was surely a sign of exceptional, nay, divine quality in the child!

After the buffaloes had passed, the parents and the child went on to Meḷgāṣ. When they had been at Meḷgāṣ for fifteen days, they noticed that the boy grew so rapidly that they could see him getting bigger from day to day, and soon he was grown up. He was called Kwaṭöw.

One day Kwaṭöw went into the buffalo pen and played there with the buffalo dung so that he was covered with the dust of the dung; his father rebuked him and was blowing on him to remove the dust when the boy changed into a kite and flew away. The next day he resumed human form, but from that time he stayed in the village only at times, and otherwise he lived in the woods. After about eight days, he refused to take food from the village, and he joined the gods.

At that time the gods sat below a hill, on a place called Pōlkab, and held council. Kwaṭöw went and sat on top of the hill. The gods said, "How come he sits on top of the hill while we sit below? That is not at all good." And they decided to kill him. So a few of the gods went to Kwaṭöw and told him, "We will show you your country" (for each of the gods had his appointed place). They took him to a steep precipice and threw him down. But Kwaṭöw changed into a kite, flew away, and again sat on the top of the hill. The gods decided to try again; so they took him to the hill KōrḪöw, inhabited by a god of the same name, and threw him down. Kwaṭöw was not killed, but he instead pulled up a bamboo tree, flew back, and struck KōrḪöw on the head. KōrḪöw's head split into three pieces: one of these pieces is now the well-known hill — the Drug — seen from Coonoor, while the other two are peaks of the ridge running out to the Drug.

Kwaṭöw returned to his hill, and the gods said, "We cannot kill him; he has some power; let us try it out." So they gave him the following task: could he turn the low streams and fill the high streams? Kwaṭöw took a huge stone (which may still be seen near Konōṣ) and put it in the stream so that it flowed upwards. The stream begged Kwaṭöw, "We are upwards because of our order, but it is very difficult for us; please let us go our ordinary way." So Kwaṭöw took away the stone, and the stream resumed its natural course.

The gods decided to try his power in another way, and they asked if he could tie the sun with a stone chain. Kwaṭöw took a stone chain, tied it to the sun, and brought the sun down near Konōṣ, tying it to a tree. When the sun wanted to drink, Kwaṭöw took it to a stream from which it drank, and now one can see a hole in the stream where the sun drank. Then Kwaṭöw took the sun to a pool called Kōnēṛ, tied it to the trees, and submerged it.[14] It became dark both in this world and in the realm of the dead. The people of the realm of the dead came to the gods and asked them why they allowed Kwaṭöw to do such things; the gods then begged Kwaṭöw to put the sun back, acknowledging that he was a god (*töw*) and the most powerful of gods. He should no longer be called Kwaṭöw but Mēlïtars because he was superior (*mēl*) to all the gods and also could "go to 1,600 places, 1,800 places" — that is, he should not belong to only one place (*nōṛ*) like other gods but could go anywhere.

Mēlïtars then put the sun back in its proper place.[15]

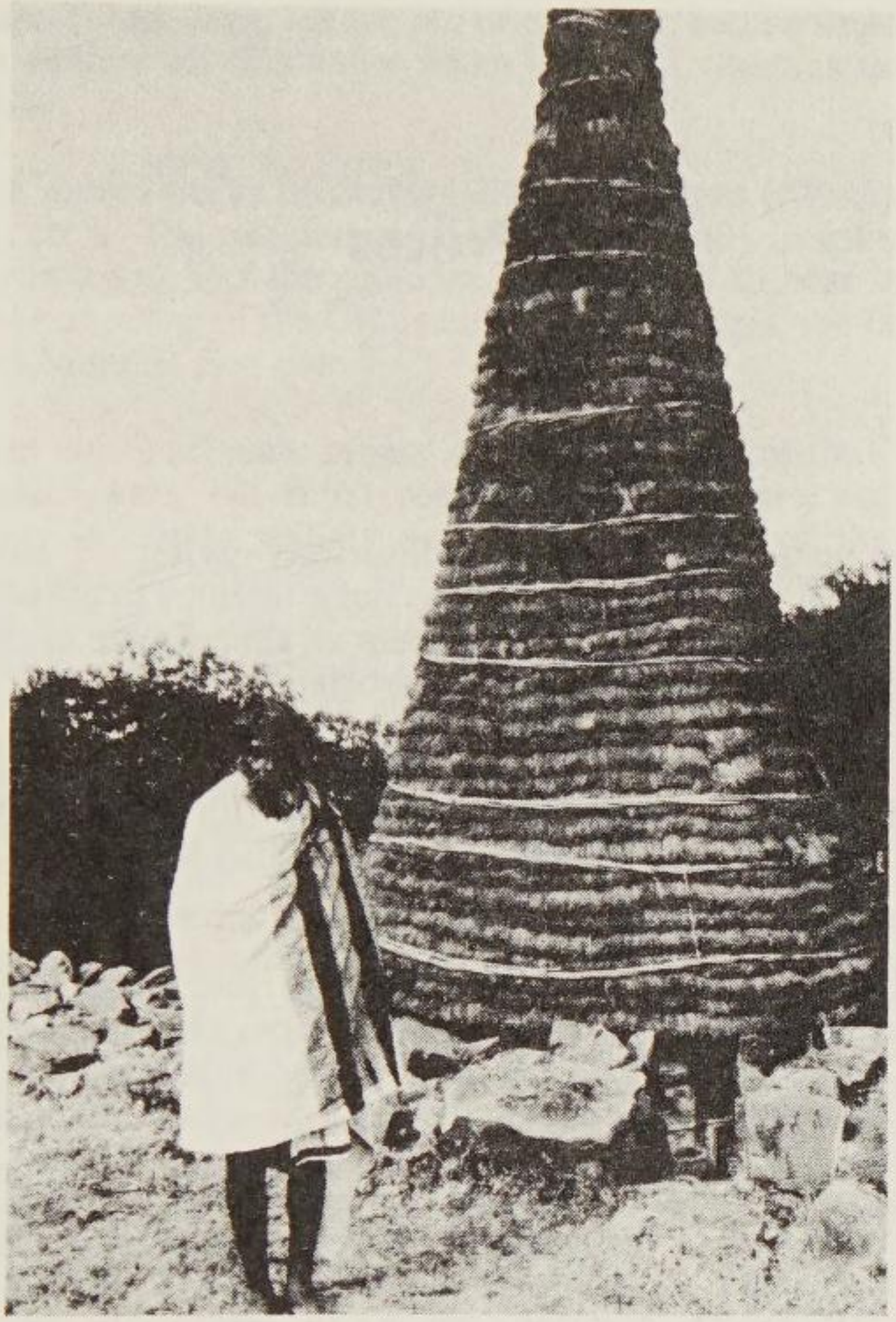


Fig. 32: So-called 'Toda cathedral' (1976)

# Notes

[1] The possession event was described earlier. I have no doubt whatsoever that it was genuine; it was quite obvious to all who saw it that the informant experienced at that moment an altered state of consciousness, which is technically termed "state of dissociation."

[2] This name — a central deity of the Ūrāḷis and Shōlegas, as well as Vëṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas — is obviously connected with the name Mahādeśvara and "Madheswara," i.e., Mahā-deva-īśvara (also Mahādeva, Maheśvara), an epithet of Siva as the Supreme God.

[3] The etymology is quite uncertain; the name was sometimes pronounced as [samaṇä], which gives a possible connection with Pali *samaṇa-* (Sanskrit *śramaṇa-*), the term for Buddhist/Jaina ascetic monk. In Basava's Kannaḍa *vacana* 103, the term *savaṇa* denotes a Jaina. It is therefore possible — since the myth is obviously a mixture of tribal lore with Saiva motifs — that the evil demon represents the Jainas, and the myth on one level refers to the struggle between them and the Vīraśaivas in Southern Karnataka. S. G. Morab in *The Soliga of Biligiri Rangana Hills* (Calcutta, 1977), 21, mentions omens in dreams: to see a Liṅgāyat mendicant "symbolizes god Mahadeswar"; it is a good omen. This increases the probability that the entire story of Mādēšūrsāmi is (also) a Liṅgāyat (Vīraśaiva) topic. As will be shown, the myth has many layers and components.

[4] The mother (*ammā*) goddess (*dēvī*) of the ant hill (*puṟṟu*) was born from the *bōnu* [hole] of an ant hill built by white termites (*këṟaga*) in Uttūrdeśa, somewhere in Mysore. She is a virginal goddess, an *Ur*-mother, of the Ūrāḷi tribe. The role of the ant hill in creation and ancestor myths in India is enormous.

[5] The deity's birth is of course quite exceptional: first, he incarnates of his own will without the participation of a male (father) and is (twice) born from a virgin. Second, he causes the death of his mother: the ancient tribal goddess of the ant hill dies in the process of giving birth to a child who perhaps represents a 'new' religion. The motif of the splitting of the back is derived from natural observation: the Ūrāḷis maintain that an insect, which actually exists, gives birth to its progeny in the month of Chitra by bursting open its back, and then it dies.

[6] This is of utmost importance since "Mādappa" resembles the Kannaḍa-Tuḷu-Telugu term for the *jāti* of cobblers, and an important motif of the myth centers on this name when a pair of shoes is made for the demon Savaṇa.

[7] These names occur in slightly different shapes (Kārayan, Kāreya, etc.; Billeya, etc.). The two persons figure prominently in Irula, Ūrāḷi, and Shōlega mythology. For the moment, it is enough to bear in mind that Kārayya is *the* ancestor of the Ūrāḷis and of the Shōlegas, too (according to Thurston and Morab). See note 8.

[8] When we use such labels as "tribal," "demitribal," "Hindu," "plainspeople," etc., we must realize that there are no watertight compartments in Hindu society and culture in spite of the seemingly immobile hierarchical structure. In religion and culture, the continuum and the flux, the diffusion that goes both ways is very much apparent even 'synchronically.' Historically, an anthropological-social group that might have had a "tribal" status 'pure and simple,' say, 2000 years ago — i.e., being outside Hindu society proper — is today regarded as Hindu *jāti*, usually of a very low rank (cf. the Maṟavar, Kaḷḷar, Paratavar, and, very probably, the Mādigas, too). As for the myth, a simplified Shōlega version is told by S. G. Morab. Kārayya was the brother of Billayya, alias Mahādeśvara, who lived in the Geḍḍesa Hills. Billayya was the progenitor of the Śivacāris. The brother fell into the custody of the demon Savaṇan, who made Kārayya a shepherd and maltreated his brother for insubordination. With the aid of the gods, Billayya killed Savaṇan, and for that Kārayya decided to kill him. After a chase, Billayya submitted and agreed that Kārayya should have the first claim to all offerings. This version is nearer to the Thurston-Rangachari version of 1909 than 'my' Ūrāḷi version. However, I consider the Ūrāḷi version the most all-comprehensive, satisfactory, detailed, and 'logical' of all of them.

[9] Told by Rāmä of Tuḍikere/Kūnjapeṇe, in 1976, when he was about 45 to 50 years old. He died in November 1979. I keep him in grateful memory.

[10] Irula *bōka*, etc. (cf. Ālu Kuṟumba *bōka*); *pūki, pōka, pōki,* etc. (cf. also Pālu Kuṟumba *pōkkănu*) *Felix chaus* Guldenstaedt. According to some other informants, the animals were monkeys rather than wild cats.

[11] Irula *nēramara* and *kalluvämara*; I could identify neither of the two botanically.

[12] A clan of the Tōṟ̪Θaṣ moiety. I could not discover why they have their own realm of the dead. Their world of the dead is Wynaad and is called Kyūḷfeṟ̪y or Kyūḷxaṣ.

[13] The journey to the realm of the dead was described in the classic book by Rivers, *The Todas* (London, 1906), 398 ff., and by L. Šapošnikova in *Das Geheimnis der Toda* (Leipzig, 1973). I checked the

descriptions with my assistant/interpreter J. D. Rajiah, who knows a lot about Toda folklore, and with some Toda informants.

[14] The myth, as stressed above, is still very much alive among the Todas. Emeneau's *Toda Songs* contains five references to the event, e.g., song 201:19: "She has become as if tied by a stone chain. She is (like the sun that Kwaṭöw submerged) at Koneṛ."

[15] Another version, mentioned by both Breeks and Rivers, gives the task as "Can he tie the male buffalo and catch the sun?" The sun was at that time sitting on the back of a male buffalo, and Kwaṭöw first used an iron (?) chain, which was melted by the sun's heat; then a bronze chain, which was also melted; and finally an iron chain (*kaṣṭegaṣ*), which did not melt.

# Ne Plus Ultra

It is a very sad, very painful sight that meets the eye of the visitor to the bazaar at Ootacamund,[1] where tribal jewelry is pawned by the Todas, Kotas, and other tribes to the Marwari, Jain, Gujarati, or Chetti pawnbrokers, to disappear ultimately as the private possession of some Western tourist or of a European or American profiteer. (Dutch towns abound with small but prospering shops offering "Orientalia" for enormous prices!) Often the Westerner does not have the slightest idea what he is buying; he has no rapport with the tribal culture in question. And within the shop — a den of robbery and shame — the dejected Toda sits half-drunk on cheap whiskey, touching for the last time with his large fingers a magnificent silver necklace, 150 years old, which had been worn by generations of his forebears, while the Muslim pawnbroker offers him a price equivalent simply to the weight of the silver piece — to sell it the next day at a 1,000 percent profit.[2] Why is this going on? Why do the Kurumbas, the Irulas, the Todas, and the Kotas constantly complain about the merciless exploitation and cheating that they suffer at the greedy hands of the trading castes from the plains? Why do they have to sell their last precious possessions?

First of all, the tribal peoples do not have "infinite" needs, as we in our civilization have. They can and do work hard when necessary, but they typically do not find much pleasure in hard labor. The Anglo-Saxon Protestant ethics of hard work, responsibility, and frugality are completely alien to them. They are given to immediate enjoyment rather than future gratification. A tribesman who worked too hard and was closefisted would go entirely counter to the values and opinions of his society; nothing should interfere with the prompt prospect of pleasure. This temperament is naturally exploited by the shrewd tradesmen from the plains.

However, in my opinion, the tribals' capacity for direct spontaneous emotion and personal independence is captivating and something for us to learn from, in spite of the fact that it is misused by the unscrupulous shopkeepers from the North and other greedy traders and pawnbrokers.

Above all, there are, deep in the tribal consciousness, two features that influence their attitude. One is their concept of existence, which is cyclical,

timeless, historically unconcerned, and hence infinitely more relaxed than ours. Tribals enjoy life with zest, accepting pleasures and dangers as they come. When they sleep, they sleep; when they rejoice, they rejoice; when they mourn, they mourn. The Irulas are certainly not "noble savages"; that picture is naive and silly in its deceitful romanticism. But they have a spontaneity and single-mindedness that is enviable.

The other trait is the fact that primitive or even semi-primitive societies have an built-in inalienable feeling of identity through their birth and their status in a kin group and in a completely defined, closed social organization. They have a sense of belonging, a sense of intimacy and home. Thus, the Todas, despite of all the disasters that have befallen them, still know how to be happy — not "happy" in any complicated and artificial sense, induced by drugs or on a psychiatrist's couch, but simply happy.

Their simplicity, ignorance, and pleasure-loving temperaments have made almost all Nilgiri tribals a very easy prey to the educated cunning and intelligence of Hindu aggression. Hence, the attitude of most tribals to the plainspeople is that of hidden enmity.

The Nilgiris, which had once been a rather isolated island of mutually integrated tribal cultures of several communities in harmonious interaction (Todas-Kotas/Kurumbas/Irulas), were first penetrated by the Badagas who carried their plainspeople ideology derived from Karnataka and imported their agricultural modes of production into what had been mainly hunting, food-gathering, and pastoralism; their expansionism affected the old tribal structures radically. They were followed by Westerners with their tea and coffee plantations, their new technologies (roads, railway, postal service, etc.), and their exploitation of tribal labor. But real drastic changes and a catastrophic impact on the traditional tribal ways came only after 1947 and in subsequent years, when Hindu and Muslim plainspeople literally invaded the hills *en masse* and transformed the once relatively tranquil, harmonious, well-balanced area of the Nilgiris into a battlefield of competition, interference, exploitation, and suppression.

What is, indeed, a serious problem is the complete misunderstanding of tribal psychology and attitudes — not to mention the tendencies and prejudices — appearing in official publications that should know better. For example, a recent Draft Report Project for the Development of Primitive Tribes in the Nilgiris (no date) circulated as confidential and "for official use only" by the Government of Tamilnadu's Department of Harijan and Tribal Welfare describes the Todas as "a somewhat lazy lot" (p. 42) who have shunned agriculture because "they are not known for hard physical labor"; they are also depicted as being, by physical appearance, "a little aggressive," but in spite of that, "offences like physical violence or murder are almost rare among them" (p. 42). The tribals, it is maintained, "do not realize the value of time," but this attitude "can and must be changed" (p. 50), so that the Todas, almost entirely dependent in their economic subsistence on their splendid buffaloes, should rather become potato-growers. It is good to read in the same report (p. 41) that proposals were sent to the Government to enact legislation enabling the restoration of all tribal lands to their rightful owners.

I am not very optimistic about the future of either tribal cultures or tribal languages in the Nilgiri Mountains of South India. Some of the tribes, such as the colorful Todas, may preserve their identity in spite of the many occasional pressures exerted upon them, because their culture is so specific, elaborate, and closed; because they are truly 'magnificent' in appearance and hence have become a tourist attraction to be preserved; or because among

them there are people, such as my friend Evam (Īfam) and others, who know how to fight for their communities. Other tribes — like the Kotas — are in much worse shape, in spite of the heroic activities of men like Tūj (cf. Emeneau 1946:261-73). Their entire socioeconomic structure is collapsing, and it appears that they will ultimately be wiped out by the combined efforts of the plainspeople and the Badagas. Yet other tribes, like the Irulas, whose culture is not as well-defined, closed, specific, colorful, and strong as that of the Todas, may be simply submerged in the sea of Tamil Harijans. Some of the more remote tribal societies, such as the Pālu Kuṟumbas, may linger on for some decades to come. There is a lot to do for the enthnographer, the anthropologist, the linguist.

The Nilgiris are a marvelous area. And we may yet be in for some real surprises, particularly in the Wynaad region. Unknown peoples. Undiscovered, undescribed languages. Paul Hockings has made me aware of an oversight in my list of the sixteen communities enumerated in a recent paper of mine. Indeed, I have not included Wynaad Chettis and Mauntadan Chettis in my list. Hockings tells me[3] that they speak "Maturu!" I have *never* heard of that language before.

Who would not like to be a discoverer?

# Notes

[1] In a recent communication (dated April 4, 1982, at Ooty) D. B. Kapp tells me that even Ootacamund ("the Queen of the hill-stations") suffers from air pollution!

[2] Not an academic case. I had such a magnificent Toda necklace (Toda *kēvizh*) in my hands. Since I could not afford to pay the 3,000 and odd rupees demanded by the Marwari shopkeeper, I offered it to the Madras Government Museum. They, too, declined to buy it for want of funds. On the silver necklace were coins from the early years of Queen Victoria.

[3] Personal communication, December 11, 1981.

# Appendix A

## A List of Irula Garden Plants and Cultivated Fruits, Vegetables, Roots, Grains, and Spices

**Fruits** (*pammu*)

banana (*Musa paradisiaca, vā̄, vā̄pammu*)
cherimoyar (*Annona cherimola*)
grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*)
guava (*Psidium guajava, koyyā̄*)
jack (*Artocarpus integrifolia, cakke*)
jaumon-plum, nevel (*Eugenia jambolana, nōra*)
lemon, citron (*Citrus medica, imbi*)
lime (*Citrus aurantifolia, imbi*)
loquat (*Eriobotraya japonica*)
mandarin orange (*Citrus recticulata*)
mango (*Mangifera indica, māvu*)
papaya (*Carica papaya, poppuḷipammu*)
passion fruit (*Passifloria edulis*)
pineapple (*Ananas comosus, arnācipammu*)
pomegranate (*Punica granatum*)
pumelo (*Citrus grandis*)
tamarind (*Tamarindus indica, puḷi*)
tree tomato (*Cyphomandra getacea*)
watermelon (*Citrullus vulgraris, darubūcikāyi; Trichosanthes dioeca, kōcakāyi*)

**Vegetables** (*dāgu, kāyga*)

bitter gourd (*Momordica charantia*)
brinjal, eggplant (*Solanum melongena, vadane, vedene*)
cabbage (*Brassia oleracea, kōcu*)
chow-chow (*Sechium edule*)
cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*)
gourd (*Lagenaria vulgaria, buṛuḍe*)
kidney bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)
lablab bean (*Dolichos lablab, avare, vā̄re*)
pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan*)
pumpkin (*Cucurbita sp., kumbaḷakkā, kumbḷekāyi, kumbakāyi*)
tomato (*Lycopersium esculentum, kākkedāgu*)

**Roots** (*kaṅgu, kāṅgü, kēcāṅku*)

canna (*Canna indica*)
giant taro (*Alocasia indica*)
potato (*dorekaṅgu*)
sweet potato (*Ipomea batatas, bĕḷḷekaṅgu, vĕḷḷedakēcāṅku*)
tapioca (*Manihot utilissima, pūlekēcāṅku*)
turmeric (*Curcuma longa, manja*)
yam (*Dioscorea aculeata, vaḷḷikaṅgu*)

## Grains

amaranth (*Amaranthus fariniferus, kīre*; and its edible leaves *dāgu*)
finger millet (*Eleusine coracana, rāgi, rāyi*)
Italian millet (*Panicum italicum, pāṇḍi, pāṇḍi, tene*)
little millet (*Panicum sumatrense*)
maize (*Zea mays, cōḷa*)

The Irulas also know of and use *Cajanus indicus* (*tovare*) and common millet (*Panicum milaceum, cāme*), though they do not grow either grain.

## Spices

cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum, ēla*)
chili (*Capsicum frutescens, perańgi*)
curry-leaf tree (*Murraya koenigii*)
mustard (*Brassica juncea*)
pepper (*Piper nigrum, maḷagu*)

Among the grains, the three leading dry-field plants are the finger millet, the Italian millet, and the little millet. The Irulas also know of and eat the following, though they do not grow them: paddy (*nellu*), dhal (*paruppu*), ground nut (*kadale*), areca nut (*ḍakke*), onion (*vëńgiya*), garlic (*vëḷḷevëńgiya*), and drumstick (*nugge*).

# Appendix B

## Glossaries of Indian Terms

### Irula

*aḷuṅgukaṟi* edible hedgehog meat

*āḷkaṅgu* lit., human root; the root of *Dioscorea daemona*, often in the shape of a human figure

*āḷvaḷḷi* a kind of wild yam (*Dioscorea daemona*)

*cogāḍi* spearfowl

*dore* white man; any superior male person, master

*imbimara* lemon tree, citrus (*Citrus medica* )

*kāremare* very probably the emetic nut-shrub (*Canthium*) with bitter, inedible fruits

*kauḍāri* partridge

*muḷḷāmpaṇḍikaṟi* edible porcupine meat

*vaṇṇa* typical Irula female dress

### Kannaḍa

*beṭṭa* mountain

*doḍḍa* big

### Kota

*ān* elephant

*kaṛdy* sloth bear

*koḷ* a kind of clarinet or oboe

*nāym* tribal or village council

*puj* tiger

*tūṛmarm* hill mango (cf. Toda *tīr*)

### Kuṛumba

*ānemōttan* (Jēnu K.) elephant driver, mahout

*kugalu* (Pālu K.) clarinet

*nāya*$^{n}$ (Ālu K.) tribal/clan/village council

### Sanskrit

*avatāra* lit., descent; divine incarnation

*devī* goddess

*garbhagṛha* lit., womb-house; the innermost shrine (the central sanctum) of a Hindu temple

*iṣṭadevatā* favored, chosen deity

*jāti* caste, as functional in contemporary Hindu social hierarchy

*nāgamaṇi* snake-jewel

*nāgaratna* snake-jewel

*paraṃparā* uninterrupted sequence, traditional succession

*pūjā* Hindu ritual worship

*śakti* energy; effective power; the personification of the god's energy; female counterpart of a Hindu god

**Tamil and Generally South Indian**

*angavastiram* upper cloth of males

*dōsa, dōsei* South Indian pancake

*nākamaṇi* snake-jewel

*pūjārī, pūcāri* (Sanskrit *pūjā* + *kārī*) ritual specialist, officiating priest (especially of a popular or tribal god)

**Toda**

*ān* elephant

*ars* white man

*āṣ* Toda house

*egaṇ* large bandicoot (*Bandicota indica*)

*ēṛ* Toda male buffalo

*ïr*, pl. *ïrām* Toda female (sacred) buffalo

*kāṛ* sloth bear

*kaṭ fūf ōy* lit., having become a *kaṭ* blossom; in a Toda song about a woman who 'blossomed' to beauty

*kaṭ fuṭ nōṛ* growing places of the plant *kaṭ* (*Strobilanthes*), considered holy

*kïrmēṇ* panther

*kïṛmiṣy* *Acronychia laurifolia*, a tree significant in Toda and Kuṛumba culture

*kōḍsōty* jungle animals

*kōg* barking deer

*kōltmox* assistant dairy priest

*kōṭnōy* wild jungle dog

*kurparz* black, poisonous snake, much feared by the Todas

*kwarg* monkey

*kwaṣm* sacred name of persons, animals, and objects, used in traditional songs and ritual

*kwaṭy* cat

*kwaṭynerūf* spleen

*kwēl* a kind of clarinet or oboe

Kwïṭoṛy Toda name of Elk Hill

*moḍ* exogamous patrilineal clan or Toda settlement (mund)

*mox Θōṭyt* the act of having a concubine; regularized concubinage

Nōṭiṣy Toda name of Mount Snowdon

*nōym* tribal council

*ōf* snake

*ōɬ fōš* lit., human speech; Toda language

*petöw* great god

*pily* sorcery

*pilyxōṃ* sorcerer

*poɬōɬ* dairy priest

*puxury* bamboo flute

*püṣy* tiger

*pūtxuɬy* Toda embroidered garment (upper cloak) worn by men and women (*puthkuli*)

*pyūf ōy pütywïṛ peš tōn ōy kwïsïΘeṅg* when you blossomed like the *Strobilanthes*, I sucked like the big bee (from a Toda song)

*tī* sacred dairy

*tïṇ* sleeping platform

*tïṛ* *Meliosma pungens*, M. Wightii; a tree sacred to the Todas

*tōn fōmō* may honey come (part of a Toda prayer)

*tōn īpy* honey-bee

*töw* god

*töwe nōym* lit., gods' assembly; a designation of Mt. Nōṭiṣy

*töwōɬ* diviner

*töwΘïṭ* lit., god mountain; i.e., mountain considered to be god

*üš* fie! pish! be off! scram!

ŪΘiḷṇ Toda name of Club Hill

# Bibliography


Aiyappan, A. 1948. *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes in the Province of Madras.* Madras: Government Press.

Balakrishna, K. V. Bettada Soligaru. 1953. *Janapragati* (in Kannaḍa). Bangalore.

Bhanu, Ananda B. 1976. "The Economic Organization of the Cholanaickans." In *Dravidian Linguistic Association of India Seminar*. Trivandrum.

Buchanan, Francis. 1807. *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar,...from Tippoo Sultan.* Vol. 2. London.

Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. 1928. *Circulars of the Linguistic Society of India* (May 14):7-8.

Chidambaranatha Pillai, V. 1976. *Phonology of Kasaba with Vocabulary.* Annamalainagar.

————. 1978. *A Grammar of the Kasaba Language.* Annamalainagar.

Deoras, P. J. 1965. *Snakes of India.* New Delhi.

Diffloth, Gerard Felix. 1968. "The Irula Language, a Close Relative of Tamil." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles.

Dubois, J. A. 1906. *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies.* 3d ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press. First Indian impression, Delhi, 1978.

Emeneau, M. B. 1937a. "The Songs of the Todas." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 77:543-60.

————. 1937b. "Toda Garments and Embroidery." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 57:277-89.

————. 1938a. "Personal Names of the Todas." *American Anthropologist* 40:205-23.

————. 1938b. "An Echo-Word Motif in Dravidian Folk-tales." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58:555-70.

———. 1941. "Language and Social Forms: A Study of Toda Kinship Terms and Dual Descent." In *Language, Culture, and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*. Edited by L. Spier, A. I. Hallowell, and S. S. Newman, pp. 158-79. Menasha.

———. 1944-46. *Kota Texts. Parts 1-4*. University of California Publications in Linguistics, nos. 2-3. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1948. "Taboos on Animal Names." *Language* 24:56-63.

———. 1958. "Oral Poets of South India: The Todas." *Journal of American Folklore* 71:312-24.

———. 1965. "Toda Verbal Art and Sanskritization." *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 14, nos. 3-4:273-79.

———. 1966. "Style and Meaning in Oral Literature." *Language* 42:323-45.

———. 1967. *Collected Papers*. Annamalainagar: Annamalai University.

———. 1971. *Toda Songs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1974. *Ritual Structure and Language Structure of the Todas*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s. 64, pt. 6. Philadelphia.

———. n.d. "Languages of the Nilgiris." In *The Nilgiris: The Ethnography of an Indian Mountain Region*, edited by Paul E. Hockings. In press.

*The Ethnographic Report on the Cholanaickans of Kerala*. 1976. Report submitted to the Department of Harijan and Tribal Welfare, Kerala State. Trivadrum.

Frere, Mary E. 1870. *Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Tales Current in Southern India*. 2d ed. London.

Gardner, R., and K. G. Heider. 1968. *Gardens of War*. New York.

Gnanambal, K. 1954. "The Kanikkar of Travancore: Their Religion and Magical Practices." *Department of Anthropology Bulletin* (Calcutta) 3 (January): 19.

Grigg, Henry Bidewell, et al. 1880. *A Manual of the Nilgiri District in the Madras Presidency*. Compiled and edited by H.B. Grigg. Madras.

Hamp, Eric. 1975. "Labialization in Iruḷa." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17, nos. 3-4:251-52.

Harkness, Henry. 1832. *A Description of a Singular Aboriginal Race Inhabiting the Summit of the Neilgherry Hills, or Blue Mountains of Coimbatoor, in the Southern Peninsula of India.* London.

Haussig, H. W., ed. 1982. *Wörterbuch der Mythologie.* I. Abteilung, 18. Leiferung. K. V. Zvelebil, Mythologie der Tamilen und anderer drawidisch sprechender Völker. Stuttgart.

Hockings, Paul E. 1972. *A Bibliography for the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India.* New Haven.

————, ed. 1980. *Ancient Hindu Refugees: Badaga Social History 1550-1975.* New Delhi: Vikas.

Jagor, Andreas Fodor. 1914. *Südindische Volksstämme.* Berlin.

Kapp, Dieter B. 1982. *Ālu-Kuṟumbaru Nāyaⁿ. Die Sprache der Ālu-Kuṟumbas.* Grammatik, Texte, Wörterbuch. Wiesbaden.

Keys, William. 1812. "A Topographical Description of the Neelaghery Mountains." From a letter by William Keys, Assistant Revenue Surveyor, to W. Garrows, Collector of Coimbatore. In Grigg 1880:xlviii-li.

Lee, Richard B. 1979. *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1967. *The Scope of Anthropology.* London.

Luiz, A. A. D. 1963. *Tribes of Mysore.* Bangalore.

Lushington, Alfred Wyndham. 1902. "Hill Forests of North Coimbatore." *Indian Forester* (Calcutta) 28:134-50.

Mathur, P. R. G. 1973. "Cholanaickans." In *Tribal Situation in Kerala.* Trivandrum.

Morab, S. G. 1977. *The Soliga of Biligiri Rangana Hills.* Calcutta.

Noble, W. A. 1968. "Cultural Contrasts and Similarities among Five Ethnic Groups in the Nilgiri District, Madras State, India, 1800-1963." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Ouchterlony, John. 1849. "Geographical and Statistical Memoir of a Survey of the Neilgherry Mountains, under the Superintendence of Captain J. Ouchterlony." *Madras Journal of Literature and Science* 15:1-138.

*Piṅkalanikaṇṭu mūlamum uraiyum.* 1917. Madras.

Pope, G. U. 1873. "A Brief Outline of the Grammar of the Tuḍa Language." In *A Phrenologist amongst the Todas*, edited by W. E. Marshall. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

Rice, Lewis B. 1898. *Epigraphica Carnatica*. Vol. 4. Bangalore.

Rivers, W. H. R. 1906. *The Todas*. London.

Šapošnikova, L'udmila. 1973. *Das Geheimnis der Toda*. Leipzig.

Shaktivel, S. 1972. "'Tōṭar' (Todas)." In *Tamiḻakap paḻaṅkuṭi makkal*, edited by S. Agesthialingom. Annamalainagar: Annamalai University.

Shortt, John. 1869. *An Account of the Tribes on the Neilgherries*. Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London, n.s. 7:230-90. London.

Steiner, George. 1975. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.

Thurston, Edgar, and Kadamki Rangachari. 1909. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. 7 vols. Madras.

Turner, Ralph Lilley. 1962-66. *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages*. London.

Woodford, Peggy. 1978. *Rise of the Raj*. Speldhurst.

Ziegenbalg, Bartholomaeus. 1926. *Malabarisches Heydenthum* (1711). Edited by Willem Caland. Amsterdam.

Zvelebil, Kamil V. 1954. "Modré hory a jejich obyvatelé" (Blue mountains and their peoples). *Nový Orient* 9, no. 4:49.

———. 1955. "Hospodářské a společenské vztahy nílagirských kmenů" (Socioeconomic relationships among Nilgiri tribes). *Československá ethnografie* 3, no. 3:236-48.

———. 1968. "Iruḷa: A South Dravidian Language." *New Orient Bimonthly* (Prague) 7, no. 3:94-95.

———. 1971. "Iruḷa Vowels." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 13, no. 2: 113-22.

———. 1973. *The Iruḷa Language*. Wiesbaden.

———. 1979a. "'Elephant Language' of the Mahouts of Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 4: 675-76.

———. 1979b. "The Honey-Gathering Skills of a Nilagiri Tribe." *Anthropos* 74:577-81.

———. 1979c. *The Iruḷa (Ëṛla) Language. Part II*. Wiesbaden.

———. 1980. "A Plea for Nilgiri Areal Studies." *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* 9, no. 1:1-22.

———. 1981. "Problems of Identification and Classification of Some Nilgiri Tribes." *Anthropos* 76:467-528.

———. 1982. *The Iruḷa (Ĕṛla) Language. Part III. Irula Lore:Texts and Translations*. Wiesbaden.

———. 1985. "The Body in Nilgiri Tribal Languages: A Contribution to Areal Linguistic Studies." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 4:653-74

# Index


## A

*abba* (Irula) 83, 105, 140, 141
*Acronychia laurifolia* 19
*aḍuguḍu* (Irula) 121
Āgamic worship 55, 138, 141
*aggwe* (Irula) 138
agriculture, dry-field 79
*Akam* 88
alcohol, in Irula life 79
*āḷi* (Irula) 80
*āḷkaṅgu* (Irula) 117
Ālu Kuṟumba(s) 35, 44, 55, 152
Ālu Kuṟumba language 107, 148
*āḷvaḷḷi* (Irula) 117
Amanōṟ 155, 156
*Amaranthus fariniferus* 78, 80
*ammā* (Irula) 139
Amunōṟ 61
animals, domesticated 83
— sacrificial 83
animal sacrifice 83, 144, 145
ant hill 153, 154
*Apis dorsata* 44
*Apis indica* 44
Aranadans 2
*ars* (Toda) 22
*Artocarpus hirsuta* 38
*aṭṭi* (Irula) 71
*avatāra* (Sanskrit) 138, 152
Aynūru 149, 152

## B

Badaga language 107, 108, 109, 112, 113
Badagas 19, 164, 165
Badirän 25, 30, 139, 140
Barliar 35
barter 85, 89
Basava 160
bazaar towns 89
Beḷigiri 23, 29
Bĕṭṭa Kuṟumba(s) 10, 23, 32, 55
*bhadra* (Sanskrit) 139
*bhakti* (Sanskrit) 88
Bharati, S. 43
*bhūta* (Sanskrit) 147
*Bibos gaurus* 41
bier 101
Biḷigiri Raṅga 138
Biḷigiri Rock 138
Biliyatoga 87, 136
Billayya 15, 52, 150, 161
Bīmä 23, 68, 113, 115, 117, 121, 133, 136
birds, in Irula culture 43
Bojan 23
*bōka* (Irula) 41, 53, 161
bow 86
bracelets, protective 97
Breeks 162
bride, Irula 97, 98
bridegroom, Irula 97, 98
Buchanan, Francis xv, 80, 86, 87

*būdam* (Irula) 139
*buddhi* (Sanskrit) 124
buffalo 41, 42
*bugari, buguri* (Irula) 61, 129
*būjä* (Irula) 144
*būjäri* (Irula) 25, 68, 137, 139, 140, 141, 145
Būman Tāyi 138
Būmi Tāyi 80, 133
burial-memorial centers 67

## C

*cakkemara* (Irula) 24
*Canis aureus* 41
*Canthium* 36
*cappara* (Irula) 71, 119, 120, 133
*Cassia auriculata* 88
cats 41
*cele* (Irula) 12, 144
*cēlemara* (Irula) 11
Chafe, W. L. xvi
Chatterji, Suniti Kumar 125
Cholakkars 55
Cholanaickans 55
*cīge* (Irula) 94
cinchona 34
Citragupta 44
clans, Irula 54, 63, 68, 90, 145
climatic conditions 15, 16
clitoridectomy 94, 121
clitoris 133
cobra, in Irula culture 43, 144
coffee 33, 34
Coimbatore 6
conehead, in Toda culture 35, 36
*contes drolatiques*, Irula 119
*Crocodilus palustris* 42

## D

Dakṣa 10
Dākṣāyanī 10
ḍällu (Irula) 87
dancing, Irula 128
death 100, 101
Devī 10
*devī* (Sanskrit) 105
*deyva* (Irula) 136
Dharma 154
diet, Irula 78, 79
Diffloth, Gerard F. 5, 29, 31, 53, 64, 113, 134
digging stick 80
*diṇe, düṇe* (Irula) 71
*dīpa* (Sanskrit) 101, 141
*dīpamadulu* (Irula) 71
*doḍḍu* (Irula) 41
*ḍokanni* (Irula) 75, 97
*dore* (Tamil, Irula) 32
*dōsa* 117
Dravidianization 86
dress, Irula female 75, 78
— Irula male 75
*dua* (Irula) 127
*dua uga pāṭṭu* (Irula) 127, 145
*dubele* (Irula) 75
Dubois, J. A. 8
*dumbi, tumbi* 44, 145
Dumont, Louis 4
*dusti* (Irula) 75
dying, attitude toward 100

## E

*ebbukaṭṭe* 35, 114
echo-word motif 125, 126, 133, 134
economy, Irula 83, 85
ecotypes, Nilgiri 15, 16, 20
elephant drivers 15
*Elephas indicus* 39
*Eleusine corocana* 78
Emeneau, M. B. xvi, xvii, xix, 44, 45, 56, 57, 60, 63, 107, 108, 109, 125, 126, 162
*ēne* (Irula) 39
*ēr* (Toda) 42
*eṛava* (Kannaḍa) 53
*ĕṛla, ĕṛḷa* (Irula) 52
*ĕṛḷacīme* (Irula) 20, 55, 56

*ĕṛḷa nāya* (Irula) 20, 55, 108
Ĕṛḷasīme 10, 20
*ĕṛla vamca* (Irula) 55
*ĕṛlci* (Irula) 78
Erular root 87
*erume* (Irula) 42
*Eucalyptus globullus* 33

## F

family, Irula 70
fauna, of the Nilgiris 38
*Felis catus* 41
*Felis chaus* Guldenstaedt 41, 161
festival, of the *pēy* 141, 144
Finicio, Jacomo (Yacome Fenicio) 7
fire-making implement 89
flood, universal 154, 155
flora, in Irula culture 33, 34, 35, 36, 38
— of Irula country 20
— of the Nilgiris 15, 16
folklore, Irula 112
food, gathering of 85, 86
— in Irula culture 78, 79
— Irula festive 79
— kinds of 78, 79
— patterns of 78
foraging way of life 85
forest produce 88, 89
fox 41
Frere, Mary E. 43
Friš, Oldřich xvi, xix
functional polytheism 135
funerals, Irula 101
— Toda 156
future of tribal cultures 163, 164

## G

*Gallus sonneratii* 86
game, in Irula culture 42
*garbhagṛha* (Sanskrit) 105
gardens, cultivation of 80, 83
— in Irula economy 80
— Irula implements for 80
Garkiyur 24, 25
gathering of forest produce 88, 89
*gauḍä* (Irula) 68
Gauramma 23
*gāvu* (Irula) 12, 144
*gāvutoga* (Irula) 12, 144
Gnanambal, K. 2
*gōḍe* (Irula) 71
gods, Irula 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140
*gōḷu* (Irula) 101, 136, 139
gooseberry tree 38
*gōpe* (Irula) 67
Gōppamma 138
*grāmadevatā* (Sanskrit) 135
grammatical retentions 111
*guḍi* (Irula) 11, 67, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 146
*guḍikĕṭṭu* (Irula) 101
*guḍra* (Irula) 101
*guḷḷanäri* (Irula) 41
*guṇḍakallu* (Irula) 140
Gundri 29, 30, 146
*guru* (Sanskrit) 149, 152

## H

handicrafts 89
Harijan 83
Harkness, Henry 80, 83, 86, 87
headmen, of Irula village 68
Hette 11
Hindi 83
Hinduism 135
Hinduization 12, 55, 83, 115, 139, 155
Hindus, aggression of 164
— caste-society of 79
— mythology of 152, 155
— society of 54, 55
Hindu Saivism 147
history, Irula ancient 53, 54
Hockings, Paul 107, 165
*homo equalis* 4, 54

*homo hierarchicus* 4
honey, gathering of 88
— in Irula culture 44, 88
— in Ūrāḷi lore 150, 151
honeybee 44
Honey Kurumbas 88
(*see* Jēnu Kurumbas)
house, Irula 71
human sacrifice 2, 44
Humboldt 111
hunt, ceremonial and ritual 86, 87, 144, 145
hunter-gatherer culture 3
hunter-gatherers 9
hunting 85, 86, 87
— animals for 42
— kinds of 86, 87
— traditional 86
hunting-gathering 79, 85, 112
husbandry, Irula 83

## I

identity, feeling of 164
*imbimara* (Irula) 12, 36, 137
incest 134, 154
Intöw 61
*ïr* (Toda) 42
*iṛavan, iṛavāḷar* (Malayalam) 53
*iruḷ* (Tamil) xv, 53
*ïruḷa* (Irula) 53
*iruḷaṉ* (Tamil) 53
*iṣṭadevatā* (Sanskrit) xvii
Iṭaiyaṉ 137

## J

jackal 41, 124, 125, 126
Jagannathan, K. V. xvii
Jagor, Andreas Fedor xv
Jain, Jaina 160
Jakobson, Roman xvii, xix
*jāti* (Sanskrit) 161
*jātti* (Irula) 68, 97, 98, 99
*jāya* (Irula) 114, 145, 146, 148
*jāyakārā* (Irula) 127, 146, 148
Jēnu Kurumba(s) 10, 15, 22, 39, 88
*jōke* (Irula) 136
jungle-cat 41, 53, 153

## K

*kaccemuṇḍu* (Irula) 75
Kadar 2
*kaḍime* (Irula) 128
Kāḍu Nāyika(s) 39 (*see* Jēnu Kurumbas)
*kakkaṇa* (Irula) 75, 97, 109
Kaḷampaḷḷa 22, 24, 31, 39, 50
*kallu* (Irula) 67, 75, 89, 101, 104, 144
*kallugoppe* (Irula) 101
*kaṇḍavaru* (Irula) 71
*kaṅgu* (Irula) 44, 54, 78, 87
Kannaḍa 9, 30, 32, 49, 50, 52, 107, 108, 109, 112, 113
*kanni* (Irula) 97, 139
*kaṇṇi* (Irula) 86, 87
*kannime* (Irula) 97
*Kantapurāṇam* 43
*kāpi* (Irula) 34
Kapp, Dieter B. 55, 56, 64
*kāppu* (Irula) 75, 97
*Kāraimaḍai* 6, 105, 135, 137, 138
*kāraimaram* (Tamil) 105
Kārayya 15, 30, 52, 150, 151, 152, 153, 161
Kāremĕḍe 105, 137
*kāremĕḍe tēru* (Irula) 105
*kareniru* 98
Karnataka 29, 153, 164
Kasaba(s) 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 29, 34, 49, 50, 52, 54, 55, 63, 83, 85
(*also* Kasavas, Kasubas, Kasuvas)
*kaṭ* (Toda-Kota) 35, 36
*kāṭṭāḍu* (Irula) 42
*kaṭṭe* (Badaga, Ālu Kurumba) 35
*kaṭṭu-kāḍu* (Irula) 80
*kāvicīle* (Irula) 141
*kavḷ* (Kota) 11
*kēa* (Irula) 78
*kēcāṅku* (Irula) 78, 87

Kerala 6, 25, 29, 139
*kere* (Irula) 23, 111
*kēṛu* (Irula) 111
*kēṭṭēḍa* (Irula) 140
*kiḷiya* (Irula) 140
*kīlōga* (Irula) 101
Kitūrpayk 11
*kōa* (Irula) 42
*koálu* (Irula) 38, 49, 61, 129
*kōci* (Irula) 75
*kōḍali* (Irula) 80
*kogálu* (Irula) 38, 49, 129
*koḷ* (Kota) 129, 154
*kōlantēnu, kōlandēnu* (Irula) 44, 116
Kolikkarai 20, 56
*kōlu* (Irula) 128
*kōṇe* (Irula) 42
*koppe* (Irula) 67, 101
Kōṛ⓯öw 15, 158
Kota(s) 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16, 19, 55, 56, 107, 108, 113, 165
Koṭn 15
*koṭṭamara* (Irula) 36, 137
Kōvan (*also* Kōyan) 6, 122
Kōyä 54
Kōyanputtūr 6
*kōyi* (Irula) 145
Kōyikere 20, 23
Krishna 12
Kṛṣṇa 138, 139
*kuḍil* (Irula) 95
*kuḍumbä* (Irula) 70
*kula* (Irula) 54, 68, 90, 101
*kuladeyva* (Irula) 136
Kūnjapeṇe 20, 23, 56, 68, 90, 136, 137 (*also* Kunjapanai)
*kunni* (Irula) 44, 88, 109, 114
*künni* (Irula) 88, 109, 114
*kūre* (Irula) 67, 71, 89
*kūretoga* (Irula) 70, 71, 136, 140
*kuṛiñci* (Tamil) 35
*Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu* 91
Kurumba, language 9, 23, 49, 107, 111
— tribes 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 19, 20, 22, 23, 31, 35, 55, 56, 61, 62, 64, 79
*kūrve* (Irula) 42, 78, 87
Kusumale 138
*kuyi* (Irula) 101
*kwälü* (Irula) 38, 49, 61, 129
*kwaṣm* (Toda) 157
Kwaṭēn 11, 19, 61
Kwaṭöw 15, 155, 156, 157, 158, 162
*kwaṭy* (Toda) 41
*kwēṭ* (Toda) 60, 65
*kwïg* (Toda) 10

## L

*Lachesis gramineus* 44
Lakṣmaṇa 53, 155
*ḷamme* (Irula) 97
language, 'primitive' 111
Lefévre, Father 2
Lesný, Vincenc xvi, xix
Lévi-Strauss, Claude 2
Lingayat, Liṅgāyat 43, 151, 152, 153, 160
*lingua franca* 108
linguistic area 108
— convergence area 108
— diffusion area 108
— microarea 114
— multilingual convergence area 108
linguistic innovations 111, 114
— retentions 114
livestock centers, Badaga-Kasuva 85
livestock herders 85
Lord of the World of Māya 152
love-life, of Irulas 93, 94
love songs, Irula 94
Ludwig, Alfred xvi, xix
Lushington, Alfred Wyndham 88
Lytton, Lord 8

## M


Mackenzie, Colonel 8
Mādaga, Mādiga 150, 151, 161
Mādamma 151
Mādappa 138, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153
mādari 150
Mādēšūrsāmi 146, 149, 150, 151, 152, 154, 160
Mādēva 150
Madheswara 151, 160
*maḍikĕṭṭu* (Irula) 75
*maduve* (Irula) 97
*maduvenāḷu* (Irula) 97
Mahādeśvara 52, 147, 160, 161
Mahādeśvarasvāmi 15, 135, 136, 137, 152, 153
Mahadeswar 160
*mākāla* (Irula) 15
*māl* (Ūrāḷi) 150
Malayam 107, 109
Malleśvara Peak 137, 147
mango showers 15, 83
*maṇiyakārä* (Irula) 68
Maṟavar 141
*Märchen* 115
Māri 83, 145
marriage, Irula 97
marriage-types, Irula 100
Mariamma 19
Masaṇa Mēstiri 23, 95, 113, 119, 133
Masaṇi, Masiṇi 139, 145, 146
Masaṇiguḍi 139
Mātaṅgi 151
Mathesius, Vilém xvii, xix
Mauntadan Chettis 55, 165
Māyavar 150, 152
Meenakshisundaram Pillai xvii
*mĕkku* (Irula) 88
Melanid 109
Mele Nāḍu Irula(s) 52, 54, 83, 85
Mele Nāḍu Irula ancestor myth 153, 154
*Meliosma pungens* 36
*Melipona spp.* 44
Mēlïtars 158
*Melursus ursinus* 38
memorial stones 67, 101
memorial temples 67, 101
menstruation 94, 95, 96
— first occurrence of 95, 96
— huts for 95, 96
mĕṭṭu (Irula) 75
*Michelia nilagirica* 61
Middle Tamil 20
*mocule* (Irula) 42
*mod* (Toda) 60, 156
*modali* (Kuṟumba) 56, 64, 68
*Momordica charantia* 148
*mōna koṭṭe* (Irula) 121
Morab, S. G. 160, 161
Mother Goddess of the Ant Hill 149, 152, 160
mountains as gods 10, 11
*mucuru kunni* (Irula) 44
*mucurutēnu* (Irula) 44
Muḍuga(s) 23, 42, 49, 55, 56, 64, 79, 122
Muḍuga language 107
Mueller, Max xvi, xix
Mukařovský, Jan xvii, xix
Muḷḷi 25
*muṇḍu* (Irula) 75
*muni, müni* (Irula) 136, 139
*Muntiacus muntjak* 42
*mūppä* (Irula) 68
Murugan 12, 138
mushrooms 88
music, Irula 128, 129
musical instruments 128, 129
*muṭṭikĕṭṭu* (Irula) 75
Mysore State 139
myth, the central Ūrāḷi 149, 150, 151, 152, 153
mythical complex of Irulas, Ūrāḷis, and Shōlegas 153
myths, Toda 155, 156, 157, 158
myths and legends, Irula 115

## N

Nāmakar 11
name-giving ceremony 95
names, Irula 95
Nandi 12
Nanjanagode 147
Nanjappa 147
Naranili 2
Narasimhan, S. 23, 29, 56, 64
*näri* (Irula) 41
narration, in Irula 111, 112
narratives, Irula 112
nature, attitudes toward 45
nature-culture opposition 3, 154
*nāya* (Irula) 68, 97
*nĕḍukĕṭṭu* (Irula) 75
*nelli mara* (Irula) 38, 153
neolithic 80, 85
*nĕṛe* (Irula) 95
*nĕṛe abba* (Irula) 95
*netaru* (Irula) 12, 144
*nicciya* (Irula) 97
Nijagante 150
Nīla Cōlagatti 150
Nīlagiri Raṅga 85, 137, 138
Nīlagiritoga 137
Nīlamele 90
Nilgiri Ranga 85, 137, 138
Nilgiris, name of 17
Noble, William A. 5, 34, 35, 80, 85
"noble savage" 164
non-Brahmin traits 83
non-Hindu tribal worship 144
nonvegetarian sacrifice 144, 145
Nouet, Jean 30
*nōym* (Toda) 22, 61
*nūrekaṅgu* (Irula) 153

## O

*oḍuppa* (Irula) 71
*okkilanāya* (Irula) 148
Old Tamil 20, 111, 145
*ole* (Irula) 71
*ōṛ fōš* (Toda) xviii
Ōn xviii, 42, 61, 155, 156
orality 112
*orula* (Irula) 53
Ouchterlony, John 86

## P

*pacādu, pecādu* (Irula) 136
*pacce* (Irula) 78
*paccepāmbu* (Irula) 44
*paḷakka-vaḷakka* (Irula) 53
*pālamarō* (Tamil) 24
*paḷame* (Irula) 113
paleolithic 85
Pālu Kuṟumba(s) 6, 36, 55, 56
Pālu Kuṟumba language 107
*pāṇḍi* (Irula) 153
*Panicum italicum* 78, 145
*Panicum spicatum* 145
*panikāla* (Irula) 15
Paṇiyan(s) 2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 55, 79
Paṇiyan language 107
Panter-Downes, Molly 8, 9
*Panthera tigris* 41
Pāppammā 23, 113, 115
Paramaśiva 116, 147, 155
*paraṃparā* (Sanskrit) xvi, xvii
*paraṇi* (Irula) 68
Pariah 151
Parthasarathy, N. 141
Pārvadi-Paramacivä 135, 136
Pārvatī 116, 147, 155
paternity, among Todas 64
*pē* (Irula) 136, 139, 140
*peguḍi* (Irula) 139, 147
*pēpāṭṭu* (Irula) 122, 140, 141
*percaṅga* (Irula) 113
Perialwar 113
Pertold, Otakar xvi, xix
Perumāḷ Raṅgasāmi 136
*peruntēnu* (Irula) 44
*Petaurista philippensis* 42

*petöw* (Toda) 61
*pēy* (Irula) 25, 70, 86, 139, 140, 144
*pēy*, etymology of 147, 148
*pēyguḍi* (Irula) 25
*Phallus impudicus* 88
*Phyllanthus emblica* 38
Pike, Kenneth L. xvi
Piljean, Evam (Īfam) Beryl 20, 22, 56, 165
*Piṅkalanikaṇṭu* 35
*pízhkvazhkhem* (Toda) xviii
plantations 34
plantation work 83, 85
*poɬōɬ* (Toda) 157
*poṇḍikari* (Irula) 41, 46
*pongal* (Tamil) 121
Pope, G. U. 60
*Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai* 88
possession, by deity 146
pre-Dravidian 109
pregnancy 94
pre-Tamil 87
Price 8
priests, Irula 85
puberty 95, 96, 97
pudenda coverings 75
*pūjā* (Sanskrit) 101, 137, 138, 141, 144, 145, 146, 151
*pūjāri* (Tamil) 105, 138, 148
*pūki* (Irula) 42
*püli* (Irula) 41
*pūne* (Irula) 41
Punisa Dandanayaka, General 7
*punyasthala* (Sankrit) 8
*Puṟam* 91
*puṟṟu* (Tamil) 105
*pūrviga* (Irula) 53
*puthkuli* (Toda) 61
Puttammādēvi 149
*puṭṭu* (Irula) 145
*pūṭxuɬy* (Toda) xviii, 61, 157

## R

Rajiah, J. D. 2, 29, 32, 108, 112, 119, 162
Rāma 41, 53, 152, 153, 154, 155
Rāmä 23, 121, 154, 161
*Rāmāyaṇa* 53
*Randia dumetorum* 38
Raṅga 7, 11, 12, 36, 135, 136, 137, 138
Raṅgaboṭṭu 36, 135, 147
Raṅgacāmi 12, 135
Raṅgacāmigiri 36
Raṅgammāboṭṭu 105, 147
Raṅganādar 147
Raṅganātha 105, 137, 138, 147
Raṅganāyakkamma 138
Raṅgarāmä 138
Raṅgasāmi 137
Rangaswami 36, 153
Rangaswami Peak 6, 11, 12, 15, 24, 38, 49, 105, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 148
Rangaswami Pillar 15
Raṅga Toga 12
Raṅga worship, legend of 137, 138
Rāvaṇa 152
Rāyappan 23, 30, 44, 89, 113, 116, 146
realm of the dead, Toda 156, 161
riddles, Irula 126, 127
*riëkaṅgu* (Irula) 153
rites of passage 93
Rivers, W. H. 35, 36, 41, 44, 57, 161, 162
Rosa, Dom Francisco 7
Roy, A. K. 4

## S

sacrifice, animal 83, 144, 145
— human 2, 44
Saiva 151
*śakti* (Sanskrit) 105
*samaṇa*, etymology of 160
*sampradāya* (Irula) 53, 54, 138
Sangam poetry 43

Sanskritic gods 55
Sanskritic "Great Tradition" 151
Sanskritization 63, 64, 115
*Sapindus trifoliatus* 89
Sapir, Edward xvi
Šapošnikova, L'udmila 161
Savaṇa, Savaṇan 52, 149, 150, 151, 160
seasons 15
semen 95
Seringapattam 136, 138
sex, among Irulas 93, 94
sexual intercourse, positions for 94
sexual life, among Todas 56, 57
sexual organs 93, 94
Shaktivel, S. 57
shifting cultivation 9, 79
shola 16
Shōlega(s) 22, 23, 30, 49, 52, 54, 63, 79, 138, 147, 151, 152, 153, 154
Shortt, John 83, 87, 88
Sister Sophie 29
Siva 10, 12, 118, 160
Sivaraj, P. 23, 32, 38, 42, 50, 63, 64, 70, 87, 94, 95, 99, 100, 106, 127, 136, 139, 147, 148
Skanda-Kārttikeya 152
slash-and-burn cultivation 3, 80
— technique of 80
snake-as-lover motif 44
snake-jewel 43, 44
*Solanum melongena* 148
songs, Irula 127, 128
South Dravidian 107, 108, 109
state of dissociation 160
stone, lifting of 140, 141
story-telling, Irula 112, 113
*Strobilanthes*, conehead 16, 17, 35, 36
*Strobilanthes* (*Acanthaceae*) 35
*Strobilanthes kunthianus* 35
Subbiah, Kokilam 20, 22, 29
Subrahmaṇya-Murugan 152
substratum, lexical 109
Sullivan, John 8, 35
Sultan Tippu 6, 24, 34, 138
Śūrapadma 152
Suzuki, Daisetz T. 45
*svayambhū* (Sanskrit) 12, 36, 105, 106
Swaminatha Iyer, U. V. xvii
swidden agriculture 3, 80, 85

## T

*taḍi* (Irula) 83
*tagaṣ* (Toda) xviii
*tāli* 99
*Tamar. chebula* 89
*Tamar. indica* 89
Tamil 20, 24, 29, 31, 32, 35, 43, 49, 83, 88, 93, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113
Tamil Harijans 34, 83, 100, 165
Tamil-Malayalam 108
*tanikūre* (Irula) 67, 95
*tanmāna* (Irula) 124
Tāraka 152
Taṭātakai-Mīnākṣī 133
tattoos, in Irula culture 78
*tāy* (Irula) 75
Telugu 32
Tengumarahada 24
*tēnu* (Irula) 44, 54, 88
Tēpax 10
*Terminalia* 16
Thurston, Edgar 80, 86, 88, 113
Thurston-Rangachari 29, 149, 151, 161
*ti* (Toda) 61, 157
*tigïḍa* (Irula) 34
*tiṇe* (Ūrāḷi) 71
*tïr* (Toda) 36
*Tirukkuṛaḷ* 88
*Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṛpurāṇam* 133
Todas 56, 57, 60, 61, 62
Todas, culture of 57
— dancing of 57
— embroidery of 65
— language of 22, 60, 61, 107, 108
— mythology of 61, 62
— names of 38

— place-names of 61
— prayers and curses of 44, 45
— ritual of 41
— songs of 60
Todramala 7
*toḍudi* (Irula) 44
*toga* (Irula) 44, 83, 121, 136, 137, 139, 144, 145, 146
*togāndra* (Irula) 136
Tŏkiṣy 10, 61, 62, 155
tools, Irula 80, 83
*töw* (Toda) 61, 158
trade 89
'tribal,' definition of 161
tribal worship 12, 135
*triśūla* (Sanskrit) 12
*Triticum vulgare* 78
Trnka, Bohumil xvii, xix
*tūḍe* (Pālu Kuṛumba) 36
*tudr* (Toda) 36
*tukḍe, tūkḍe* (Irula) 36
*tumpi* (Tamil) 145
*tuṇḍu* (Irula, Tamil) 75
*tüni* (Toda) 61
*turuli* (Irula) 129

## U

*ubbaṭṭi* (Irula) 141
Uchida, Norihiko 109
*udurkāla* (Irula) 15
*ulume* (Irula) 87, 94
*ūndillu* (Irula) 86
Ūrāḷi(s) 52, 83, 85
Ūrāḷis, discovery of 29
Ūrāḷi-Shōlega ancestral hero 151, 152, 153
*urumbele* (Irula) 75, 141

## V

Vaishnava Brahmins 105, 138
Vaishnava-Saiva syncretism 11, 12, 139
Vaishnavism 135, 138
Vaḷḷiyamman 152
*vaṇṇa* (Irula) 25, 75, 101
*Varanus bengalensis* 42
*Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa* 43
vegetarian vs. nonvegetarian food 78, 137, 138, 153
*vēl* (Tamil) 11, 12
*vele* (Irula) 86, 87
*vĕṇḍu* (Irula) 86, 148
*vēṅkai* (Tamil) 25, 79
Venugopala Pillai, M. V. xvii
*vetāla* (Sanskrit) 147
*Vetālapañcaviṃśati* 134
*vĕṭṭe, vŏṭṭe* (Irula) 86, 144, 148
Vĕṭṭe Kāḍu Irulas 52, 54, 83, 85
*vĕṭṭekārä* (Irula) 86
Vĕṭṭetoga 87, 136
*vēṭṭi, vēṣṭi* (Tamil, Irula) 75
Vēṭṭuvar 2
*vicilkāla* (Irula) 15
*viliyaru* (Irula) 86
village, Irula 67
*villiyar* (Tamil) 86
Vināyaka-Gaṇapati 12
*Vintilago madraspatana* 88
*virāli mara* (Irula) 12
Vīraśaiva(s) 151, 152, 160
virginity 97
*viruga* (Irula) 42, 114
Vishnuvardhana 7
Viṣṇu 139
*vŏḷilu* (Irula) 42
*Vulpes bengalensis* 41

## W

wealth, of Irula vocabulary 111
wedding ceremonies 97, 98, 99, 100
— Irula song for 98
— of Irulas 97
wildlife sanctuaries 29, 39
Winternitz, Moritz xvi, xix

women, in Irula society 55
worship, Irula structure of 144
Wynaad Chettis 55, 165

## Y

*yāl* (Tamil) 145
Yama 44

## Z

Ziegenbalg, Bartholomaeus xv, 8
*Zizyphus xylophyra* 36
Zubatý, Josef xvi, xix

# Note on the Author

Kamil V. Zvelebil was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1927, and he is now professor of Dravidian studies at the State University of Utrecht, The Netherlands. After studies at Charles University, he earned a doctorate in Indology, English, and Philosophy (1952), and a second doctorate in Dravidology (1959). Zvelebil specialized in Dravidian, chiefly Tamil, linguistics, and after a number of field trips to India — which were dedicated to the study of Tamil dialects, tribal languages of the Nilgiris, and cultural anthropology — he taught and lectured at various universities from Moscow to Madras, and from Pennsylvania to Paris. In 1968, Zvelebil left his homeland to become professor of Dravidian studies at the University of Chicago. Since 1970, he has lived in Holland.

One of the leading Dravidianists, and the foremost authority on Tamil literature, Zvelebil has published a long list of scholarly books; many translations from Tamil, Kannaḍa, and Malayalam; and innumerable papers and articles on various subjects connected with the field of South Indian and South Asian studies. Zvelebil is currently working on an etymological dictionary of the Irula language and an English translation of the large autobiography of Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, a great indigenous Tamil scholar. Also recently published by Zvelebil are an inroduction to Dravidian linguistics and an anthology of avant-garde Tamil poetry that he has translated into English.

This volume was edited and composed on an Apple Macintosh SE with Microsoft Word. The final pages were created on the Apple LaserWriter Plus. The text in this book is set in Times; the special South Asian character set was created using Fontographer and is based on Times.

## Foreign and Comparative Studies Publications

*African Series*

*Latin American Series*

*South Asian Series*

Lists of the publications in each of the above series may be obtained from the publications desk of the Foreign and Comparative Studies Program, 724 Comstock Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244-4230, USA.

Correspondence regarding the submission of manuscripts for review should be addressed to the editorial committee for the relevant series, at the above address.

The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, founded in 1924, is the social sciences division of Syracuse University. From its inception, Maxwell has been a center for teaching and research in public policy as well as for training in public service and academic careers. In addition to the traditional departments (anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, and sociology) there are degree-granting programs in public administration, social science, and international relations Research-oriented, nondegree programs include metropolitan studies, health and society studies, foreign and comparative studies, technology and information policy, center for the study of citizenship, social and political psychology, women's studies, and program for the analysis and resolution of conflicts.